

## Inductions still special to Ron Bradley

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[As of Thursday, June 20, 2013](#)

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Gwinnett Daily Post File Photo. Former Newton County High School coach Ron Bradley, who has collected 1,372 basketball victories in his 50-plus-year career, will be inducted this morning into the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association Hall of Fame in Dalton.

COVINGTON -- Awards and accolades are not a new thing for former Newton basketball coach Ron Bradley, having been named to as many as seven halls of fame. So it's amazing to hear getting into the Atlanta Sports Hall of Fame on Saturday will be just as special as the first one he received.

"When they recommended me, they said it would take about three years before I could get in because they had a backlog of people," said Bradley, who was selected in his first year of eligibility. "I was amazed when they called and said I was going in this year. I was shocked. I can name about 20 to 30 people that I think deserve to be in there more than I do. I think it's very prestigious and it's my seventh one. Every one of them are real special."

Some of the halls of fame where one can find Bradley and all of his accomplishments include the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame,

Georgia Coaches Hall of Fame, National High School Hall of Fame and the Georgia Independent School Hall of Fame.

"It's just special any time you go to one of these things," Bradley said. "You don't get one of these by yourself. A lot of youngsters and assistant coaches and people have put forth a lot of effort to make this possible. You're always thinking about those people because you feel like you're standing on their shoulders."

Bradley spent almost 50 years as a head basketball coach with about half of those years in Newton County, winning 1,372 boys basketball games along the way.

Bradley will feel like all the traveling and hours spent coaching was worth it Saturday as

he is honored with the likes of 1984 Olympic gold medal breaststroke swimmer Steve Lundquist, former president and general manager/owner of the Atlanta Crackers Earl Mann, former Georgia Tech athletic director Homer Rice, and former Atlanta Falcons and Braves player Deion Sanders.

While Bradley is excited to meet Sanders, he also has found memories of his time growing up in Avondale.

"I think it'll be neat to meet Deion Sanders," Bradley said. "I know he's going to break the house being the type of person he is. Then Earl Mann, he was big news for baseball. Anything that happened that concerned baseball, Earl Mann was involved. He was probably the biggest minor leaguer in the country."

Bradley said that when he was a high school senior, he did something which would not be allowed today. He would go to Ponce DeLeon Park and practice with the Atlanta Crackers.

"They offered to pay me more than anybody else if I would sign with them," Bradley said. "I thought by the time I got through with college (UGA) it would be worth more money. But I found a better deal, I got married."

As Bradley and his wife Jan were looking for information he would use during his speech, they came across all of his stat books. That was when they realized that he has been the head coach in exactly 2,000 basketball and football games. What's even more amazing is the fact that his life partner has been to all along the way.

"It makes you feel old," Bradley said. "She's missed five games and raised four kids. It's been estimated that we've ridden around the world four times on the yellow school bus."

As Bradley thinks about being inducted to yet another hall of fame, he does not think about the miles spent on the school bus or the wins he acquired along the way. He thinks about all the people that have helped him and he has met along the way.

"You have to think of all the players, there were some that you had some success with then there were some that you wish you could've done more with that come to mind, too," Bradley said. "You think about the people that have helped you coach and the fans that were instrumental. There have been so many people along the line that have contributed. I get real emotional when I start to think about all the people that are so special and have contributed to so much."

"A while ago, I figured out I was working with the most valuable possession that a parent had and that was their child. I think it's still true today. They give up one of the most special things they have to play and that's called time. Someone figured that if a player stayed in our program for four years you spend over 2,000 hours directly under our supervision. That puts a lot of pressure on you to do more than teach them how to shoot a basketball."

"Covington and Newton County has always been special because that's where we got our start. That's where we set the national record for wins on our home court. All of our children grew up there. It'll always be real special to us."

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