

Sports

Legendary Bradley returns Newton rehires architect of its championship glory years

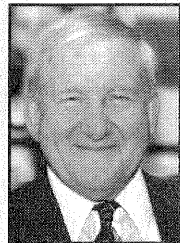
By Brian Knapp
Sports Editor

In 1958, he took the bull that is the Newton basketball program by the horns and created a dynasty. Forty-three years and more than 1,200 victories later, he's back to do it again.

In a move that sent shockwaves rippling statewide through a sport, Newton High School announced the hiring of 66-year-old Ron Bradley

as its head boys basketball coach Friday afternoon to replace the recently retired Billy Hendricks.

"We put out a vacancy notice and had people apply," said Newton athletics director Dave Easterday. "B.C. Crowell (Chairman of the Newton County Recreation Commission) called (Newton principal J.W.) Rutledge and told him he thought Ron Bradley might be interested in the job. So, we contacted coach Bradley, and he came in to



Ron Bradley returns to Newton where he built a dynasty four decades ago.

interview."

And the rest, as they say, is history. Bradley, who coached the Rams from 1958-1975, brought Newton

its only state championship in 1964, setting an entire community on fire for his program. Sold-out gyms were commonplace.

During one incredible nine-year span, Bradley's teams won a national-record 129 consecutive home games. He was selected to the State of Georgia Sports Hall of Fame in 1997. Now, his career comes full circle.

"I think he wants to end it where it all started," Easterday said. "He

knows how to coach the game, and he knows how to teach the game. And because of his reputation, I think he's going to fill the seats. It's a big boost for our program."

His place among the state's all-time greatest coaches already secure, Bradley brings a legendary resume to town with him. He ranks third on Georgia's career victory list with 1,198 (just 56 behind the

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leader) and has won three state championships and 17 region championships during his unparalleled 41-year career. He has coached 56 All-State players and one All-American.

The pinnacle came in 1964, when Bradley guided Newton to a 35-1 record and the Class AA State Championship. "Ron's Runts" as they would come to be known, won their first 27 games, suffered one disputed defeat and then won their last eight games by a 16-point-per-game margin of victory, leveling Hart County by 22 points in the state

championship game before 6,200 fans in Atlanta.

"What I remember most about 1964 is just how special those kids were and the commitment the town made to them," Bradley recalled in an earlier interview. "It was a fantastic period, something that, to this day, still warms the old heart."

A three-time State Coach of the Year, Bradley left Newton in 1975 to take over the program at George Walton Academy in Monroe. He spent a dozen seasons with the Bulldogs before making stops at Trinity Christian School, Loganville High School and Piedmont Academy.

After coming out of retirement, Bradley spent last season at Port St. Joe High School in Florida, leading a perennial doormat to the final four in the state tournament. Bradley takes over a Newton team which is only a year removed from its first region championship in 17 seasons. The Rams have put together three straight 20-win seasons and have advanced to the state tournament three straight years.

Bradley will hold a meeting at Newton High School Thursday night at 6 p.m. where he will introduce himself to current players and their parents.