

Bradley Built 'Fever' In Newton

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COVINGTON, Ga. — Call it fate, predestination, or what you will, but it just seems that it had to be — Ron Bradley and Newton County.

The first meeting of the two seemed at the time unrelated, but years later there appears an obvious connection.

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PROFILE

"I remember we had a region tournament here when I was in high school at Avondale and I wondered then why they built a big, old gym way down here in the country. You know, from Avondale this was a long way then," said Bradley.

It does seem unusual that a school as small as Newton would build a gym to seat over 1,800 people. But nowadays, thanks to Bradley, that's far from enough. Basketball would have to be rated the No. 1 business in Covington, and the "share-holding" fans consider themselves the richest around.

The wedding of the two, Bradley and Newton, dates back to 1958, a rather unceremonious affair at the time. Neither had what would be termed an "outstanding" basketball background.

AFTER AVONDALE High, Bradley went to the University of Georgia on a dual basketball-baseball scholarship, and the adjectives used to describe the Georgia athletic program back then aren't the kind one likes to remember.

Bradley started out after college as the recreation director of a park in Ft. Lauderdale. "Then I just decided I wanted to teach and coach. I heard that there was a job at Newton and I called and got it."

One year later was when it all began.

Bradley has infected the whole community with basketball fever and they love it — and him. (If there's a game somewhere else and Bradley wants to see it, the sheriff insists on driving him. If he Bradley's cars get a little worn, folks add a new one (they now have two). Even the carpet in the Bradley home is

the same royal blue as the school's color. The boosters "helped pick it out."

Bradley has responded with the winningest record of any active coach in Georgia, 346-42, and that includes 29 championships of some kind.

ONE-HUNDRED twenty-nine of those wins were strung together in the longest home court winning streak in the country. A plaque in the front of the gym honors this: "World's Record, Dec. 11, 1959 — Dec. 28, 1967, the Newton County Rams Won 129 Straight Home Court Victories Under the Leadership of Coach Ron Bradley."

"I don't think anybody coaches like anybody else. You pick up a little here and a little there and you try a little of your own. The things that work, you keep and the things that don't you drop," Bradley says.

"And, you have to go with the personnel you have. We don't play at all the way we used to. At first, we were a running team, then we went to a control offense and now we run a little more. It's just a mixture of everything you've watched and played.

IT'S THAT same positive approach in everything he does. "We try to go all out to make our kids think our program is the most important thing in the world," Bradley explained.

His dedication earned a "Special Sports Award" from Sport Magazine recently "for a lifetime dedicated to basketball." And, that's just one of many awards he's gotten. There's also a gold-plated whistle, a blue-and-white basketball, about a dozen Coach-of-the-Year awards.

There are several scrapbooks jammed with Newton clippings and there will be several more as soon as Mrs. Bradley "gets around to putting them together."

With a surrounding of success as Bradley has, one has to wonder why some college hasn't lured him from Covington.

"Are you kidding?" asks a fellow coach of Bradley. "Just tell me what college could afford him. He's got it made in Covington."

And, the gym was especially built for him, though no one knew it at the time.



Staff Photo—Robert Con
NEWTON'S RONALD BRADLEY
Builder of Winning Tradition