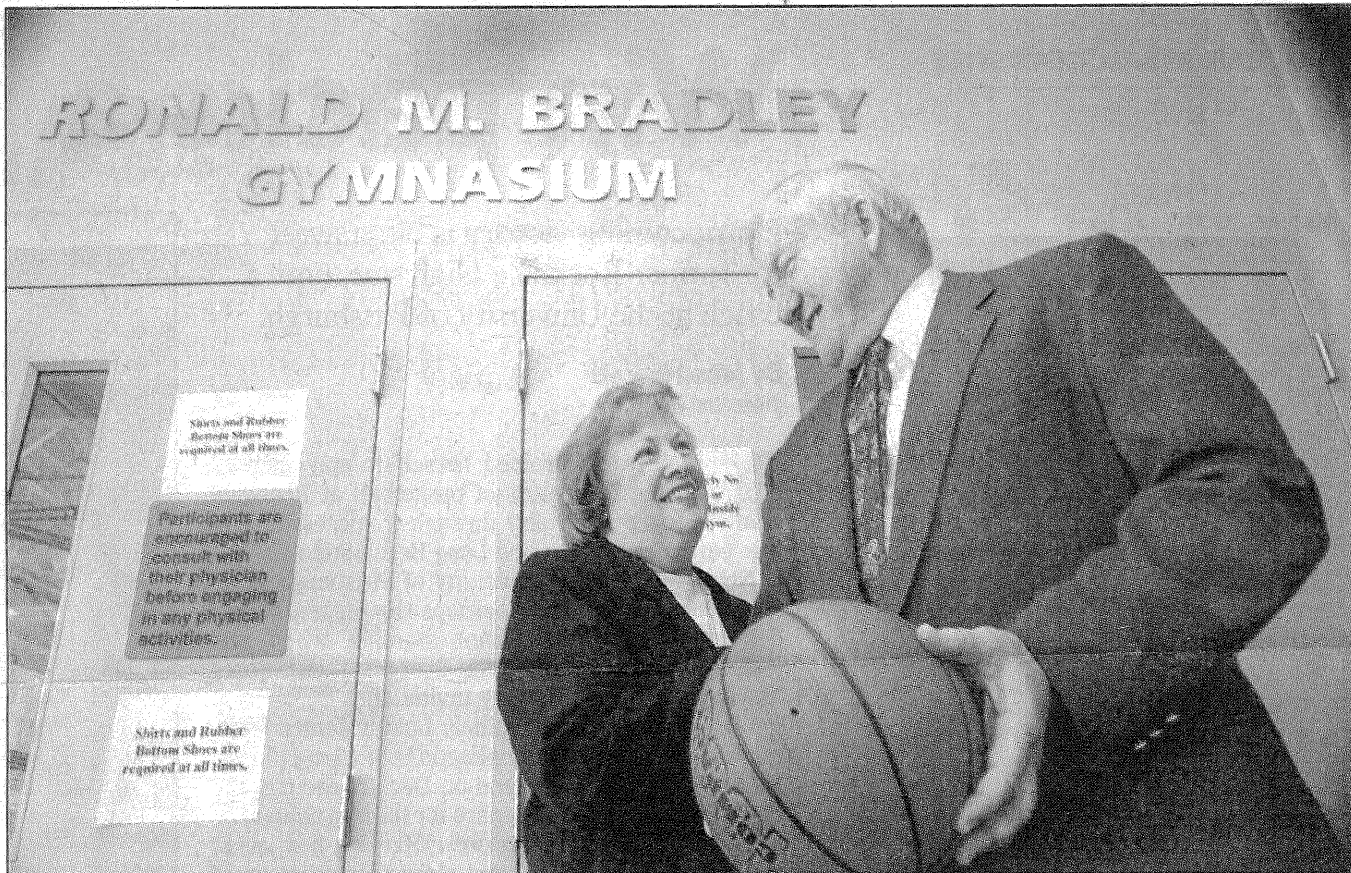


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Photos by CURTIS COMPTON/ Staff

His home court: Ronald Bradley and his wife, Jan, will be joined by hundreds of guests Sunday for the dedication of the gymnasium in Newton County's Turner Road Complex. Bradley coached Newton County High for 17 years, winning one state championship and setting a national record with 129 home victories in a row.

Newton honors a legend

Homecoming: A new county gym is named for record-setting coach with eternal ties to Covington.

By Stan Awtrey
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It's been 25 years since Ronald Bradley actually heard the crowds roar at the Newton County gymnasium. That was six Presidents ago, back when the stock market was going crazy if it approached 1,500 and before Tiger Woods was even born.

And while Bradley moved on to coach at other schools, his heart has always remained in Covington.

"This was such a special place," he said.

And Bradley has always been a special man to the people whose lives he affected during his 17 years at the school. On Sunday they'll celebrate his homecoming of sorts when Newton County dedicates the new Ronald M. Bradley Gymnasium at the Turner Road Complex.

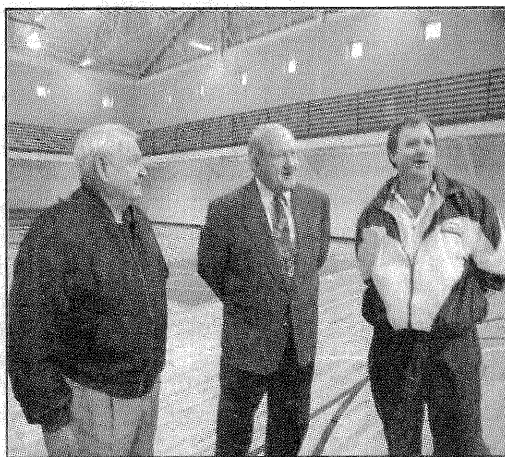
Bradley and wife, Jan, his childhood sweetheart and partner for 45 years, along with a couple hundred guests will watch as the Newton Board of Commissioners and Recreation Department officially open the spacious facility.

The gymnasium is actually two full-length courts under one roof; a curtain drops from the ceiling to divide the playing surfaces. A walking path overlooks the court.

The honor for Bradley is the second for local coaches at the Turner Road Complex. B.C. Crowell, a longtime administrator and coach in the Porterdale area, recently had a conference room named in his honor.

Bradley is a native of Avondale, where he was the leading scorer on the football and basketball team and the top hitter on the baseball team. He attended the University of Georgia and lettered three years in basketball and four years in baseball.

At Newton County, Bradley's teams won a national-record 129 straight home games over a nine-year period. They won the Class AA championship in 1964.



Reunion: Ronald Bradley (center) tours his namesake gymnasium along with one of his former players, Tommy Haley (right), and friend B.C. Crowell, a longtime administrator and coach whose name is on a conference room.

He went on to coach for 12 years at George Walton Academy in Monroe, five years at Trinity Christian in Dublin, three years at Loganville, and two years at Piedmont Academy in Monticello. All but five years of his career were spent within 20 minutes of the Covington area. He currently lives in Loganville.

His record is fantastic. Bradley has won 1,198 games (third best in Georgia history) and lost only 307. His boys teams have won 845 games (second all-time in Georgia) and posted 25 20-win seasons. His teams have won 74 championships and made 31 state tournament appearances.

He was also a pretty fair baseball coach (158-60 in 18 seasons) and football coach (130-69-6 in 18 seasons with a state championship).

But Bradley's legacy isn't limited to on-court activity. His former players can still remember the lessons they learned from those Newton County days.

"He taught us about hard work," said Tommy Hailey, who played baseball for Bradley from 1968-71 and is now director of the Newton County Recreation Department. "You

realize now that he wasn't trying to punish you by making you do so much running. He was teaching us to work hard and get better."

Bill Shaw, a vice president for Turner Broadcasting, was part of Bradley's basketball team that compiled the long home streak. Shaw said, "He taught us about winning, fairness, hard work, honesty and showed us what it took to succeed. A lot of his former players got together about 10 years ago and there were doctors and lawyers and judges and presidents of companies and people who started their own companies. . . he was quite a mentor."

Bradley looked at his players as young birds learning to fly.

"I see them as egrets," he said. "And you never know how high one of them is going to soar if you give them the chance to get off the ground."

"When I started here I thought I'd just have a job. But I had a chance to have an impact on the lives of young people because of basketball that maybe someone else couldn't touch."

One of Bradley's favorite stories concerns a young freshman who was struggling in the classroom and had considered dropping out of school. Bradley inquired about the boy's dreams.

"I couldn't believe it when he told me he'd always wanted to be a doctor," Bradley said. "Here's a guy about ready to drop out of school talking about going into medicine."

Bradley encouraged him to stay in school, helped him get his grades in order and watched proudly as the youngster finished college and medical school with a 4.0 grade-point average. He's now a successful surgeon in Colorado.

Although he's 65, Bradley isn't ready to retire. He isn't coaching this season, although he might return if he got the right opportunity.

So he's spending this winter watching games and waiting for another chance to coach and encourage another generation.

"He was quite a mentor," Shaw said. "Not only in sports, but in life. We need more men of principle like him leading our young people today."