

# OPINION

## Coach Bradley's the man; but not without Jan

They say that behind every successful man is a great woman. That is not the case with Ronald Bradley. No coach in the history of Georgia high school basketball has won more games than Bradley, the Newton High coaching legend, but Jan, his wife of 47 years, has never stood behind him. Indeed, since Bradley claimed his first victory, way back in 1958 – and even before – Jan has been right there at his side, an equal partner in the accomplishments, if not the accolades.

No person has ever heard Coach Bradley speak of his achievements in the first person singular. Whenever he talks about the wins, the losses, the championships or the records, he always talks about “we.” People are often puzzled about that because even though he now has coaching assistants, for most of his career Coach Bradley worked alone – or so most people thought. Those of us who know him best realize that the other half of the “we” in Ronald Bradley’s testimony is his lifetime partner, Jan.

I first became aware of Jan Bradley’s existence when I was a



**Darrell Huckaby**

very small child, which I’m sure will provide little comfort for her since I now appear to be at least as old, if not much older, than she. She was the lady at the Porterdale ball park, where her husband’s teams sometimes played their home games, chasing two small twin boys around the bleachers.

Actually, looking back on things, she didn’t really chase them so much. She was more prone to allow them to wander around on their own, entertaining the fans – especially the teenage girls. When they would tumble down the bleachers, as at least one of them inevitably

did, she’d dust them off, hug them for an appropriate length of time, and then send them on their way again.

When I was old enough to read the newspaper articles that came out every fall, previewing the Newton Ram season, Jan was always referred to as “the former Jan Thomas, of Avondale Estates.” I didn’t have a clue where Avondale Estates was, but it sounded regal and elegant to me, and in my mind I envisioned Jan as a regal and elegant lady. I have become very close to her over the years and my opinion hasn’t changed.

Eventually, I came to realize that the lady behind the scorer’s table at the Newton Ram games, marking down every point scored by the Rutledges and Billy Shaw and Bob Mitchell, and later Tim Christian and Stan Harris – boyhood heroes all – went with the intense warrior on the Ram bench. For years I admired the charm bracelet she wore. It was made of gold basketballs and baseballs, each bearing the small blue shield of the GHSAA and each representing a champi-

onship won by one of her husband’s teams.

When I became a coach and had the honor of winning one of those gold basketballs for myself – many years before marrying my lovely wife, Lisa – I couldn’t wait to put it on a bracelet and present it to my mother.

In high school I had the honor of being a part – albeit a very tiny part – of that great Newton Ram dynasty. Even as a youth I was amazed at the efforts Jan made on behalf of her husband and his team. She opened her home and her heart to us on a regular basis. As tournament time approached, several times a week I would be instructed to “call Jan and tell her to make us some sandwiches. We need to run up to (Ganiesville, Tucker, Atlanta, wherever) to scout a team.”

The only response I ever received was a pleasant “OK.”

I still have a box full of thank you notes and letters of encouragement Jan has written me over the years. Multiply that by the hundreds of people who have been a part of her husband’s teams, and you’ll get an

idea of how busy she has stayed.

Ronald Bradley has received much well-deserved attention as he has approached the career record for wins this season. He has won, in fact, far more games than most people have seen or ever will see. And Jan has seen them all. All but four that is. Her oldest son, Brad, had the audacity to be born in November, precluding her from attending one contest. The others she missed when her parents passed-away.

She has been there for the losses, too. Just as in life, she has seen her husband and her family through the good times and bad, celebrating in joy and comforting in sorrow.

Someone said to me last week, “Coach Bradley will soon stand alone as the winningest coach in Georgia basketball history.”

I smiled and nodded, but knew in my heart that Coach Bradley will never stand alone. Jan will always be right there at his side.

*Darrell Huckaby is a Rockdale County author and educator. E-mail him at dHuck08@aol.com.*