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# Ron Bradley's still got it after all these years

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One might think after nearly a half-century in the same profession, the enthusiasm meter might dip just a little bit. The infectious smile might fade slightly. The all-encompassing welcome might not be as hearty as once before. But then again, one might not know Ron Bradley.

"How are you," the coach of the Heritage High boys basketball team says with gusto to a visitor late last Friday evening. It's approaching 11 p.m. and Bradley's Patriots have just beaten the Eagles, 62-46. Now, he's discussing the proceedings with a reporter and the status of laundry with an assistant coach.

After a coaching career that's spanned six decades, shouldn't Bradley be at home, retired, relaxing, instead of worrying about region matchups and clean uniforms?

That wouldn't be Bradley, who can't stay away from the game he loves. Remember, he retired from his post as head boys coach at Greater Atlanta Christian last spring.

Twelve days later, he took the job at Heritage.

"Anytime you work with kids, it's special," Bradley says.

What's also special is his impact. Wherever Bradley goes, he wins. His stellar coaching career started at Newton High (then known as Newton County High) in 1957. He directed the Rams to the 1964 Class AA state title, and Newton won 129 consecutive home games during his tenure in Covington, a national record.

He's the winningest active prep coach in the country with more than 1,300 victories. At Heritage, a program that's enjoyed modest success in recent years (averaging 15 victories the previous three seasons), Bradley has sparked a rise to the top of the Region 8-AAAA, Sub-region B standings.

Heritage sits 17-5 on the season with three games left before the postseason (the Patriots' regular-season finale is next Friday at Alcovy). With disciplined ball-movement offense, perimeter shooting and solid defense, Bradley and Co. enters the region tournament as a likely candidate to advance to the Class AAAA state playoffs.

"We knew they were going to shoot the basketball well," said Eastside head coach Michael Gerald, who stood and chatted with Bradley for several minutes before last Friday's game. "All of his teams in the past usually shot the ball extremely well."

True to form, on this night the Patriots hit just under 50 percent of their field goal attempts (20-for-41). In the second half - when the game got tense - Heritage stayed patient and ran its offense well, hitting 11-of-19 shots in the final two quarters.

It's fundamental basketball, and it's a Bradley trademark. It took some time to manifest itself, as the Patriots lost two of their first three games. On Jan. 8, in a 54-53 loss at Eastside, the Patriots let a seven-point cushion slip away in the final minutes.

Since then, Heritage hasn't lost in region action. Friday, when Eastside was charging back into the game, Bradley's players didn't panic. They hit 7-of-9 free throws in the closing minutes.

"We've come a long way," Bradley admits. "We're a better team now."

Better because of the council and leadership of their head coach, a man who started his career in Covington during the Eisenhower administration. A man who is a legend in his craft, and who still finds the energy to approach it with the joy of a guy who just got his first job.

"Thanks for coming," he tells the visitor, and you can't help but be impressed.

Two generations after he began, Bradley's still going strong.