



Jan and Ron Bradley display a picture of the Rams State AA Champions from 1963. They stand in the Turner Lake Park gymnasium, which will be dedicated in Bradley's honor tomorrow at 3 p.m. Staff photo by Ron Manson

# Love of the game

**By Brian Post**  
Sports Editor

The defining event which changed forever the life of Ronald M. Bradley is as vivid now as it was the day it happened four decades ago. On a sultry summer afternoon, 18-year-old Billy Dean Rutledge, a prized pupil of the now 65-year-old Bradley, went on a fishing trip and never came back.

Cut down in his prime, Rut-

ledge drowned in Alcovy River on July 21, 1959, two weeks after being selected to the North Georgia All-Star Basketball Team. His untimely death, which broke the heart of an entire community, may have unknowingly ignited the career of perhaps the greatest sideline commander this state has ever known.

It was as if one life had been derailed so another could find its way. Tragedy has its motives.

"It had a tremendous impact

on my career," revealed Bradley, who cannot shake the haunting images of that unexplainable afternoon. "That is a memory and an experience that has stayed with me all of my life. It changed my perspective on the value of human life."

Tomorrow afternoon at 3 p.m., after a mind-boggling 1,486 victories, four state championships and 14 region titles in three sports, the Newton County Recreation Commission will dedicate its state-of-the-art gymnasium at Turner

Lake Park in Bradley's honor.

"I can't think of anyone else's name I'd want to see on it," said Newton County Recreation Commission Director Tommy Hailey. "I don't think anyone else was considered."

"Personally," Bradley said, "it's one of the most outstanding honors I've received as a teacher and a coach, because not only does it affect my life, but it affects the lives of others

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# Basketball: Legend to be honored

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who are just as important. There are a lot of wonderful people here. Most everything that was the foundation for my career started in Newton County."

For 17 extraordinary years, Bradley was the face of Newton basketball, guiding the Rams to glory that had not been imagined before and has not been approached since. From Ron's Runts to The Streak, he won 10 region championships, one state title and established a period of sustained dominance that has endured all tests of time.

From 1959 to 1967, Newton never lost a game on its own floor, reeling off a national record 129 consecutive conquests. The Rams were the only ticket in town, packing arenas to the brim. The masses could not get enough of them.

"It was a fantastic period," Bradley remembered. "We never considered getting beat. I don't know if we were even threatened many times. That was a great streak. We still run into people who want to talk about it."

Bradley parted ways with Newton in 1975, the architect

of unparalleled magic. But while the Rams' glory days slowly faded away, his status and acclaim did not.

Inducted into the State of Georgia Sports Hall of Fame in 1997 as the all-time winningest coach in state history with an astonishing 1,198 victories, Bradley retired two years later after coaching 111 varsity teams, 56 All-State honorees and one All-American.

Incredibly, Bradley had 36 seasons with 20 or more wins. And during one unforgettable 10-year span, all but two of Bradley's starters received collegiate scholarships. The other two eventually became doctors.

He has become synonymous with success.

Now comfortably retired, Bradley is savoring time with

his wife, Jan, their union in its 46th year. He watches with unimaginable pride as his two gifted sons — Bob, the head coach of the Heritage Patriots in Conyers, and Bill, the head coach of the No. 1-ranked Loganville Lady Red Devils in Loganville — follow in his footsteps on the sidelines.

"I enjoy retirement," said Bradley, a father of four and a grandfather of seven. "I miss (coaching). I miss being involved in (the players') lives. We're going to ball games and watching the grand kids. We love watching youngsters compete."

A legend will be honored tomorrow. Tears will be shed. Smiles will be cracked. Stories will be shared. And Ron Bradley will be thinking of Billy Dean.