COACH PAUL BRYANT AND THE INTEGRATION
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
FOOTBALL TEAM

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Watching the University of Alabama football team's spring practice, it is difficult to imagine a squad consisting of athletes from a single race. Most contemporary players, both black and white, cannot fathom the notion of a segregated football program. Yet, proof of such a record is evident in the photographs of pre-1970s teams that line the school's athletic complex. A black face cannot be found among the group of young men. For a university with such a checkered past on racial issues, this does not seem too peculiar. How could African-American players participate on the team if the institution did not even allow them into its classrooms? By the summer of 1963, however, the University of Alabama had been successfully integrated. Yet, it took almost seven years until Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant signed the Crimson Tide's first black football player.

There is a lack of evidence to suggest that Bryant conspired to keep African-American athletes off his team. What is apparent, however, is that he was reluctant to take a leadership role among southern coaches to bring about integration. This paper examines why it took Bryant so long to recruit black players. Five fundamental questions will be addressed: Was the delay due to the Alabama political climate of the 1960s? Did the university administration hinder attempts by Bryant to integrate? How much leverage did influential alumni command in the decision making process? What role did racism play in the coach's decision and, last, what factors finally propelled Bryant to desegregate his team?

There have been many myths surrounding the integration of the University of Alabama's football team. The most popular contends that Bryant began to recruit black players after a thrashing in 1970 by an integrated University of Southern California team. According to this version, Alabama's white players could not stop Southern Cal's powerful, black running back Sam Cunningham from racing up and down Birmingham's Legion Field. Jerry Clalborne, a former Crimson Tide assistant, overstated the influence of Cunningham, declaring that he that by "did more for integration in the South in sixty minutes than Martin Luther King did in twenty years." The game convinced Bryant of the necessity of recruiting African-American players to remain nationally competitive. The available evidence, however, reveals that the decision was not this simple. Alabama's record for the two years before the USC game had been mediocre for a program that had won three national championships during the 1960s. If Bryant believed that he could not win without black
athletes, he would have integrated his team earlier. Furthermore, the year after Southern Cal's victory, the Crimson Tide, which then had only two black players, traveled to Los Angeles and defeated a heavily favored Trojan squad. The decision to desegregate Alabama's football team involved more than merely losing badly to an integrated school.

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Any examination of the desegregation of Alabama's football program has to begin with legendary Coach Paul Bryant. No other Division I-A coach in the history of college football had more success in winning games or in controlling his program. Moreover, few college coaches have been the subject of as much hagiography. Throughout his athletic and coaching career, Bryant rarely experienced anything but success. After growing up on the edges of poverty on a truck farm in Moro Bottom, Arkansas, he received a football scholarship to the University of Alabama where he was often overshadowed by All-American Don Hutson. Yet, he earned praise for his toughness. He was often remembered for playing with a broken fibula during a game. He later brushed off the incident by saying that "it was only one bone." His role on the 1934 National Championship team, which defeated Stanford in the Rose Bowl, forever endeared him to the university's fans and alumni. After his playing days were over, Bryant chose coaching as a career. He achieved immediate success everywhere he went. Sports writer Alexander Wolfe asserts that as a head coach, Bryant "would blow into town and, saviorlike, resurrect football programs." After just one season at the University of Maryland, the Terrapins improved from a 1-7-1 record to 6-2-1. The University of Kentucky advanced from a 2-8 season to 7-3 a year after his arrival. He guided the Texas A&M Aggies to the Cotton Bowl in just three years. His coaching prowess became so obvious that he acquired fierce loyalty from both his players and coaches. Pro Football Hall of Famer George Blanda, who played for Bryant at Kentucky, remarked that "this must be what God looks like" after the first time he saw his coach.

One must look at Bryant's early coaching career to determine his attitude toward black players and if he favored integration of his team after 1963. While at the University of Kentucky from 1947 to 1953, Bryant approached the school's president, Dr. Herman Donovan, about recruiting black players. He told Donovan that Kentucky should be the first integrated Southeastern Conference team. According to Bryant, "I wanted to win, and there were a couple of black boys then who could have helped us a lot. One who went to Illinois was the best athlete in the state that year, and the other one was the son of our cook." He got nowhere in his attempt. Bryant concluded from this incident that "you don't change people's thinking overnight. Not in Kentucky, not anywhere."

The episode demonstrates that regardless of Bryant's attitudes toward blacks, fundamentally he was a pragmatist. He wanted to win. Bryant's tenure at Kentucky, however, was different than his future years at
Alabama. The Bluegrass state rests on the fringes of Dixie. Racial attitudes there were more relaxed than in the deep South. Moreover, the University of Kentucky had been integrated since 1948. It was much easier to be an innovator in racial matters than at Alabama. The main reason why Bryant was not successful in breaking down the color barrier at Kentucky was his lack of influence. Despite fielding winning teams, he had always played second fiddle to Adolf Rupp, the Wildcats’ legendary basketball coach. In addition to receiving permission from the school’s president, Bryant had to win the approval of Rupp. Rupp did not believe his basketball team needed black players, thus he was not ready for another sport to field them.

While Bryant was turning his Aggies into a Cotton Bowl caliber team, his alma mater suffered through three straight losing seasons. His success as a coach and his popularity as a Crimson Tide player, led to a groundswell of support to bring him back to Tuscaloosa. A.B. Moore, Dean of the Graduate School and long-time faculty representative to the Athletic Department, wrote to Bryant that the “alumni generally and people on the campus would give you a warm welcome. Your presence here would give Crimson Tide backers the thrill that they need.” After Rose offered the job to Bryant, John Caddell, a member of the Board of Trustees, told the new president that the hiring of the coach “was the most popular thing that could have happened from your standpoint and makes people believe that you can accomplish anything.”

Bryant received a comfortable contract that made him the second highest paid faculty member behind Rose. Part of the deal that helped lure him to the university was a promise that he would have complete control over the athletic department. Years later, he concluded “that a coach needs an ironclad contract to protect him against his superiors so that the president, or whoever is in charge, can’t lose his guts when the going gets tough.” Throughout his tenure at Alabama, Bryant ruled his team and the athletic department as he saw proper.

Bryant arrived in Tuscaloosa just after the NAACP choose the University of Alabama as a test case for the implementation of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. Two years earlier, Autherine Lucy had attempted to become the first black student to break down the walls of segregation at the school. After only three days on campus, student demonstrations employing racist slogans propelled University officials to expel Lucy. By the time that Bryant arrived on campus in the winter of 1958, however, tensions had ebbed. As historian E. Culpepper Clark asserts, “it was evident that the South was in a hiatus period of desegregation.” At Alabama, Bryant’s resurrection of the football program and Rose’s leadership helped people forget the appalling actions taken by the University during the Lucy episode.

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Unlike earlier constraints at Kentucky, Bryant had the necessary influence at Alabama to take the lead in integration. One journalist has asserted, "Bryant may have been the only public man in Alabama to transcend the issue of race." Yet he refrained. With his towering influence, Bryant did not take an active role in integrating the football team. In order to determine why, it is necessary to place Bryant's actions within the context of the actions taken by other southern universities and the attitudes of Alabama's school officials and prominent alumni.

The University of Alabama's all-white athletic department was not unusual among fellow Southeastern Conference [SEC] members. Since its founding in 1934, the league had been segregated but did not have a formal policy that forbade African-American athletes from participating in sporting events. The SEC allowed each member school and its respective board of trustees to formulate their own policy concerning race. A gentlemen's agreement, however, existed among SEC members. This secret compact sought to bar both black players or competition against integrated teams. Although the agreement did not prevent SEC teams from facing squads with black athletes, it helped keep the conference segregated until the mid-1960s.

During spring 1963, this agreement was tested. In a letter addressed to "Fellow Southeastern Conference President," the University of Kentucky's head administrator, Dr. Frank Dickey, broached the subject of integrated athletic teams. The purpose of Dickey's letter was to find out how other SEC schools would react to the desegregation of Kentucky's program. Kentucky had been integrated since 1948, but it had refrained from allowing black players to participate on its teams because of membership in the Southeastern Conference. Yet by 1963, internal and external pressures had forced Kentucky's Athletics Association Board to consider the question. Dickey posed two basic questions:

1. Would your athletic teams be able under your present institutional policies to play the University of Kentucky if integrated teams are necessary (a) in Lexington, (b) on your own campus?

2. If you are not able to play under present conditions is there a date in the future which might be acceptable in this situation?

Dickey wished neither to jeopardize Kentucky's membership in the SEC nor embarrass any other member by integrating its teams without the approval of the other schools. Despite his seemingly progressive stance, he did not favor sudden action. He asserted that his school had "not recruited any Negro players nor do we have any immediate plans to do so." Dickey stated further that he "would prefer that this matter be delayed for several years but . . . sometimes the control on such situations is outside the university."
The following spring, Steve Matthews attempted to become the first black to break the league's color barrier by trying out for Kentucky's football team. Other SEC coaches and administrators expressed little surprise at Matthew's bid since Kentucky's athletic board had announced earlier that it was opening up the athletic program to anyone regardless of race. Despite Matthew's attempt, he ultimately failed. The Southeastern Conference, however, could not stop progress. In December of 1965, Kentucky's Nat Northington became the first black player to sign a letter-of-intent to participate in football at a SEC school. He was also the first black athlete to play in an intra-conference game on September 30, 1967. Other conference members soon followed Kentucky's lead. Ironically, the University of Alabama, whose coach had suggested integration almost fifteen years earlier, lagged behind in recruiting black players.

Bryant's initial success at Alabama raised the issue of competing against integrated teams four years before the university became desegregated. In December of 1959, a comment by Hill Ferguson, a member of the Board of Trustees and a staunch segregationist, illustrated that at least one Alabama official had bowed to the inevitable. He asserted that the university "must assume that some of our opponents may show up with individual team members whose color we do not like. I think we must accept this situation." Beginning in 1959, Bryant's Crimson Tide faced schools outside the South in bowl games. After accepting an invitation to play an integrated Penn State team in the Liberty Bowl that year, Bryant and Rose received abundant criticism from segregationist factions throughout the state. The Citizens Council of West Alabama sent a telegraph to Bryant deploiring his decision to participate in the game.

The Citizens Council of West Alabama is very happy over the Crimson Tide's fine record this year. We strongly oppose our boys playing an integrated team. We hope this has been taken care of. Tide belongs to all Alabama and Alabamians favor continued segregation.

President Rose received a letter that threatened mob violence reminiscent to the Lucy debacle three years earlier. If Rose allowed the Tide to travel to Philadelphia, the letter's author promised "a most certain repetition of trouble and a very probable unhappy return of such trouble to your doorstep . . . May God have mercy on you at this Christmas season and the days to follow." One member of the Board of Trustees, Gessner McCorvey, furnished Rose with a song request list for the band to play during the game just in case anyone forgot the university's strong southern heritage. Among the tunes listed included "Dixie" and "My Ole Kentucky Home." The school also had to contend with a letter of protest from the local chapter of the NAACP that condemned the university's "racial practices as a school of higher education." This group also
pointed out the hypocrisy of Alabama's plan to travel north to play an integrated team when it refused to consider playing a squad with black members in its home state.\textsuperscript{24}

Despite the condemnation from parties on both sides of the integration issue, Bryant wanted to take his team northward. He yearned to go because, as he later claimed, "we were just getting our program going good."\textsuperscript{25} Bryant's staff also did not have problems about their players facing an integrated team. Long-time assistant coach Dude Hennessey asserted that competing against blacks "wouldn't make any difference to them."\textsuperscript{26} In addition, Bryant could not be swayed by negative comments made by fans or alumni regarding the bowl game. According to Hennessey, if some of the supporters did not like something concerning his team, Bryant told them to call him. Although Bryant knew there would be adverse reaction to Alabama playing against black athletes, he shielded both his players and staff from the criticism. "We were never scared for our jobs. He would always tell the team he worked solely for them, not anyone else."\textsuperscript{27}

Similar to his attempted integration at Kentucky, Bryant viewed the bowl game in pragmatic terms. He believed that competing against integrated teams was a critical public relations move, demonstrating that both he and his team were separate from state politics. Bryant, however, also believed that it was to his advantage to keep on good terms with politicians. Thus, after Alabama received its Liberty Bowl bid, Bryant asked Governor John Patterson for his support to take the Crimson Tide to Philadelphia. Patterson, who was busy campaigning against George Wallace for the 1960 governor's job, responded "Shoot, Bear, I'm just trying to get votes. Go on up there and play 'em."\textsuperscript{28}

Alabama went to Philadelphia to take part in the bowl game. In the ensuing years, the Crimson Tide competed against other integrated teams during the postseason. This practice became acceptable to many of the program's supporters, which Alabama began to win national championships during the 1960s. Bryant believed that Alabama's participation in these types of bowl games helped to break down the resistance concerning attitudes toward blacks in the state. "When folks are ignorant," he commented, "you don't condemn, you teach 'em."\textsuperscript{29} Apparently, Bryant believed that playing against African-American athletes helped change people's minds about differences between the races.

Some Alabamians, however, viewed such games as an encroachment upon the southern way of life. Most white Alabamians were on the defensive, either out of shame or recalcitrance. While some supporters viewed competition with integrated teams as a progressive overture, sports journalist Frank Deford believed others simply saw the games as the "War all over again." Alabama's "underfed, outmanned" boys were "beating up on the big, ugly Yankees" who were trying to impose their will on Dixie.\textsuperscript{30}
Bryant’s stance toward race seemed liberal compared to other southern coaches of the era. Joe Paterno, long-time Penn State head coach, asserted that Bryant stood out among his contemporaries in his attitude toward African-Americans. Paterno claimed that few southern coaches had the courage to leave the South to play an opponent, much less one with a black player.31 Despite Bryant’s willingness to break with SEC tradition and play northern schools during the post-season, he was still trying to find segregated opponents for the regular season.32 Furthermore, he still was reluctant to recruit black athletes. Before the integration of Alabama, this seemed natural. After Vivian Malone and James Hood stepped inside the schoolhouse door, however, Bryant did not have any official university policy to prevent him from recruiting and maintaining black players.

Integration at the University of Alabama had progressed relatively smoothly since Wallace backed down in the face of federal pressure. President Rose proudly proclaimed that “When we integrated the university, we integrated everything—swimming pools, barbers shops, the beauty parlors—everything.”33 The attitudes of white students toward their black classmates also began to change. By 1966, New York Times writer Sterling Stappey found that it was “no longer fashionable or even acceptable to be anti-Negro.” It had become “in” to be friendly to African-American students, “to give them a smile, a wave, do homework jointly, have a cup of coffee or a meal together.”34 There were still pockets of white resistance. Blacks, however, had made headway into virtually every aspect of campus life except the athletic department. This is strange considering Bryant’s apparently liberal racial views.

Some scholars argue that Bryant was reluctant to push the race issue after 1963 because he feared incurring the wrath of the university’s administration, believing that he might be dismissed if he recruited black athletes.35 This view does not take into consideration that Bryant already had attained near-legendary status by the early 1960s. He had won three national championships and his dismissal would have been an extremely unpopular move by the administration. Bryant’s power was so renowned that one of his contemporaries, Clemson’s Frank Howard, once quipped that “Bryant is the only coach who goes around the country toting his own president.”36 Bryant did not succumb to pressure to integrate his team, but he retained the power to do so, unlike others at the university. When Don McGlamery, a faculty member of the Athletic Committee, mentioned the possibility of recruiting black athletes, the Committee chairman, J. Jefferson Bennett, had him replaced. When McGlamery tried to be reappointed, he vowed to “never mention recruiting Negro athletes again.”37

Some of Bryant’s defenders claim that the state government kept his hands tied over integration.38 When asked why integration of the team had taken so long to occur, one assistant coach theorized that “probably it
had a lot to do with politics." Another long-time Bryant assistant, Clem Grycka, believed that Bryant was waiting for approval from Montgomery. Because the university was a state-run institution, he did not want to defy the governor by publicly opposing the state's policy. Rather, Bryant postponed the recruitment of blacks until "a time when the state government would find the change acceptable."\(^{40}\)

Bryant, however, had the influence to surmount any political resistance to integration. In an article on the state's political climate, Nicholas Chriss, a writer for the Los Angeles Times, asserted that "Anyone in Alabama, including ex-Governor George Wallace, hesitates before criticizing the . . . legendary head coach."\(^{41}\) Bryant had a chance to assume a leadership role regarding integration. Yet, he held back and let other, and less entrenched, southern coaches assume the lead on this issue.\(^{42}\)

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Following Alabama's integration, Bryant and university officials began to prepare a policy for the athletic department on racial matters. During the seven years between Wallace's attempt to block integration at the university and the signing of the first black football player, there were attempts by African-Americans to make the team as walk-ons. As early as 1965, two prospective black students, including George Curry, a soon-to-be graduate of Tuscaloosa's all-black Druid High School, expressed interest in participating in football. After Bryant received a letter from Curry informing the coach of his intention, he promptly turned it over to J. Jefferson Bennett, administrative Vice-President and Chairman of the Athletic Committee. Bennett composed a response to be sent by Bryant to Curry. Apparently, they had responded in a similar way to an earlier request. Bennett reminded the coach that "this is what we did with another similar one, you may remember." Using Bennett's draft as a model, Bryant wrote Curry that the university's athletic teams were open to all qualified students who had been admitted as students without regard to color. Bryant told Curry that he could try out for the team if he was accepted into the university.\(^{43}\) Although Curry was admitted in 1965, for undetermined reasons he never tried out for the football team.

Despite his prestige, Bryant was reluctant to integrate his football team until he saw how other institutions in the SEC and their supporters reacted to black athletes. During fall 1965, Bryant received a letter regarding how the school would react to playing Florida's integrated team in Tuscaloosa. Again he turned to Bennett. In a fashion similar to his response to Curry's letter, Bennett responded with a confidential memorandum, outlining a recommended answer. He asserted that the "University of Alabama will play Florida regardless of the racial composition of its team . . . I would anticipate no problems if a Negro player appeared here with a visiting team and participated in a game."\(^{44}\) Bennett also stressed that over fifty black students were currently enrolled at the university and that they had not experienced any serious problems
with white students. This response demonstrates that university administrators realized that if Alabama wanted to continue to be a member of the league, it would have to compete against integrated teams more frequently.

The letter also inquired about the university’s stance toward blacks who attempted to try out for its athletic teams. Bennett advised Bryant to respond in the following fashion: “We do not have any Negroes on our squads although, of course, any student in the University, regardless of race, is free to compete for positions on any our intercollegiate teams.” Just one year later, however, Alabama’s track coach, Ralph Genito, wrote a memorandum that illustrated the hypocrisy of this policy. In a questionnaire sent nationally to junior college coaches, Genito inquired if they had “any good white boys who meet the standards” required for SEC competition. The memorandum attracted the attention of Charles Collins, Dean of Instruction at Grossmont College in El Cajon, California.Shortly after receiving the letter, he sent a letter of protest to Genito, President Rose, the American Association of University Professors, and the United States Civil Rights Commission. Collins declared that his school “would not be party to any form of racial discrimination and must register disgust that such discrimination is still practiced by a state university within the U.S.A.”

This incident was a severe embarrassment to a university that sought to distance itself from its past. Only two months earlier, Bennett had declared to The New York Times that “our Negro students are under direct instructions to report any racial incidents immediately” by their white classmates. Rose admonished Genito by directing the coach to give equal consideration to students regardless of race. There is no evidence how Bryant, as athletic director, reacted to the situation or to the track coach.

During spring 1967, five black walk-ons attempted to challenge the color barrier of Alabama’s football team. They became the first African-Americans to successfully make Bryant’s practice team. This made news throughout the nation. An article in The Los Angeles Times announced that “in a state whose leaders preach segregation, five young negroes have broken the color line of the sacrosanct Crimson Tide.” The Washington Post printed a headline that declared “Negro May Play Alabama Football.” Bryant prepared his players for this possibility by making sure that they understood that the five individuals were to receive the same treatment from the staff as the other members of the squad. Two weeks prior to spring drills, Bryant sent a memorandum entitled “Colored Athletes” to Rose and Bennett, outlining his racial policies. He asserted that the fundamental reason he had not previously recruited black players was because there were none that he believed qualified both athletically and academically. Bryant also remarked that he did not plan to seek out African-American prospects outside the state. He would be interested, however, in any who qualified within Alabama. He claimed
that he had his eye on two players who attended a school near Tuscaloosa.50

Dock Rone, a graduate of Montgomery's Carver High School, received the most attention of the five black players because he appeared to be the only one with a chance to make the team.51 Of the five, only Rone and Jerome Tucker dressed out for Alabama's annual spring practice game.52 Although none of the blacks players made it to fall practice, they set in motion the integration of the program. Their presence on the practice field helped to modify racial attitudes because they practiced with white players while also sharing locker facilities. All-American wide-out Dennis Homan remarked that "I'm not too much for integration, but I don't see any use in fighting it... If they're good enough to make the team, I'm for them. I think it would be great if one of the negroes did make the team."53 A little over two years later, Wilbur Jackson was the first black to sign a football grant-in-aid with the Crimson Tide.

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Bryant took almost seven years to sign his first black players. An important motivation in his decision to recruit black players was the bad publicity that the team received from the national media because of its insulated schedule. As early as 1961, the Crimson Tide had been condemned for its reluctance to play integrated teams. After rumors surfaced that the Rose Bowl officials were considering offering an invitation to Alabama, the West Coast news media depicted it as an invitation to the Ku Klux Klan.54 Following the crowning of Alabama as the 1964 national champions, Los Angeles Times" sports writer Jim Murray wrote a scorching editorial that denounced the team's schedule. He declared, "So Alabama is the 'National Champion,' is it? Hah! 'National Champions' of what? The Confederacy?... How can you be 'No. 1' if you don't play anybody but your kinfolks... Alabama competes in a league of its own, by its own choosing... where they don't want any you-know-what in there cluttering up the color scheme."55 The biggest blow, however, came after the 1966 season. The Crimson Tide had just finished another undefeated season. Most people expected Bryant to receive his fourth, and third straight, national title. Yet, Notre Dame, which had a blemished record, received the number one spot in the year-end polls. Bryant firmly believed that a lack of integrated opponents cost his team the championship.56

Sports writer Frank Deford claims that Bryant decided to integrate because he believed that he could no longer compete nationally without blacks on the team.57 Many cite the lopsided losses to such teams as Missouri in 1968 and Southern California in 1970 as evidence of this view. Beginning in the 1968, Alabama had three straight mediocre years. This argument has little validity because Bryant only fielded two African-American scholarship players in 1971. Of these, only John Mitchell, an
outstanding junior college transfer, made a significant contribution. Yet, Alabama lost just one game and won the SEC championship that year.

Some members of Bryant's coaching staff attribute the lean years of 1968-70 to poor recruiting by the coaching staff, not to a shortage of black players. Hennessey asserts that, when "you won a national championship in 1961, 1964, and 1965, and you were undefeated and might have had the best team you had in 1966. There's a little thing called complacency. You sit around while not doing your job good enough in the area of recruitment and it eventually catches up to you." He

Various myths surround Bryant's decision to integrate his football program. No one except the coach and his close associates know the actual reason why he waited almost seven years to sign the first black players. Politics may have had something to do with the delay. With the possible exception of Mississippi, no other state has had a worse history dealing with its black citizens. Jeff Rouzie, a star player during this era and a current coach, speculates that even during the late 1960s, some of the wealthy, older supporters were opposed to the idea of an integrated football team. He believes that Bryant was hesitant to bring black players into a hostile environment. Rouzie asserts that his coach "had a canny ability to know when the time was right to do things and when the time was not right. He wanted the best people to play for him, but he was not sure how black players would be accepted by these wealthy supporters." He

Of all the speculation concerning the integration of Alabama's football program, the one theory that seems to have the least legitimacy is that racism contributed to Bryant's decision. Hennessey states that Bryant "never looked at an athlete's color. He just said athlete." The first black athletes to wear crimson jerseys regarded their coach in high esteem. In his later years, Bryant stated that he had more in common with many of his black players than some of their white teammates because of his poverty-stricken upbringing. "When you've been raised around blacks," he remembered, "and had them as close friends, and even had a few fistfights with them as I did, you sure should have no trouble accepting integration." Bryant asserted that he held off on integration because it might be too tough on his black players when Alabama went to play games in such locations as Mississippi. He also did not want to sign African-American athletes as a token gesture. The thought of a player "showing up with a bunch of photographers and some big-talking civil rights leader" held no appeal for him.

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Bryant's major flaw as a coach was that he was not an innovator. Rather, he would take someone else's idea and adapt it to his needs. This was certainly true in race relations. He had the prestige and influence necessary to assume a leadership role among southern coaches but he refused to shoulder the burden. Yet, it can be asked: why should he? He was a football coach. His job was to win games, not cure social problems.
And win he did. After winning three national titles and coming ever-so close to a fourth, he was named Coach of the Decade. There is no evidence to support the claim that Bryant did not become an icon at the national level until he desegregated. During the down years of the late 1960s, people did not believe that the lack of black players caused the Crimson Tide's faltering. Rather, critical fans of the program viewed Bryant's age as the main factor for Alabama's decline. Bryant's continued domination of college football during the 1970s proved these critics wrong.

Bryant's popularity would have allowed him to recruit black athletes if he had desired to do so. He had the power and prestige to surmount any resistance from state politicians, the university administration, and the Board of Trustees. His position of influence, however, also gave him the luxury to wait and see how other schools would react to the desegregation of their programs. He had the opportunity to observe how people responded to Alabama's first black athlete when basketball coach C.M. Newton signed Wendell Hudson in 1969.

Bryant moved cautiously in the area of race relations. He had no qualms about pitting his team against integrated squads. When it came to recruiting black players, however, Bryant was reluctant. He had the extraordinary ability to read people and situations. He was not going to be forced to integrate until he perceived that the university was ready. Losses to integrated teams would not motivate him. Once he decided to sign blacks, the transition occurred with little hoopla. Compared to the events surrounding earlier integration attempts at the school, scant coverage was given to Jackson's signing.

Today, the only visible traces of the segregation of the football program that exist are the all-white faces in the pictures of the teams prior to 1971. Black and white players live, eat, and practice together. Together they experience the pain of defeat and sweetness of victory. Ironically, the football program, which had been one of the last bastions of campus segregation, has become the most powerful symbol of the progress that has been made in race relations at the University of Alabama.

Notes

2. Wilbur Jackson, the first black player signed by Bryant, had accepted a scholarship before the 1970 season. Because of SEC regulations that ruled freshman athletes ineligible for intercollegiate play, he was sitting in the stands during the University of Southern California game. Glenn Gryska, interview by author, February 6, 1996, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
3. Timothy J. Bryant and Andrew Stavisky, “When Desegregation Sat in the Back Seat: The University of Alabama Athletic Department” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1993), 13. All quotations are presented in their original form.
7. A.B. Moore to Paul W. Bryant, November 22, 1957, in A.B. Moore Papers, Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Ala.; hereafter cited as HSC.
10. Following the mob demonstrations on the third day, the Board of Trustees met and decided to expel Lucy to provide security for the students and facility. Lucy’s attorneys promptly charged that the university had conspired with the mob. Once they charged this, the university expelled Lucy on the grounds that she had slandered the school’s good name. This action took place despite of the federal court order that instructed the university to reinstate Lucy. For the story of Lucy see Clark’s *The Schoolhouse Door*.
15. Frank G. Dickey to Frank A. Rose, May 2, 1963, in Frank Rose Papers, HSC.
16. Ibid.
17. *Tuscaloosa News*, March 26, 1964
19. Hill Ferguson to Frank A. Rose, December 12, 1959, in Rose Papers, HSC.
22. William Kilgore to Frank A. Rose, December 1959, in Rose Papers, HSC.
23. Geisner T. McCorvey to Frank A. Rose, n.d., in Rose Papers, HSC.
27. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
32. Bryant and Underwood, Bear, 292.
37. Don McGlamery to J. Jefferson Bennett, August 10, 1966, in J. Jefferson Papers, HSC. During the late 1960s, athletic departments around the nation were facing increasing threats from radical students and faculty. See John Underwood's "The Desperate Coach," Sports Illustrated, August 25, 1969. In a three part series, Underwood chronicles the problems that college coaches were having in dealing with the rise of the black power movement and student movements. He asserts that some radical black athletes often inferred discrimination in disciplinary attempts by coaches. These players challenged rules whenever they were contrary to their emerging cultural pride. To many coaches, it often seemed that some faculty members supported and assisted the students in their disdain for traditional athletic department practices.
42. Deford, "I Do Love the Football," 102
43. J. Jefferson Bennett to Paul W. Bryant, 1965; Paul W. Bryant to George Curry, 1965, in Bennett Papers, HSC.
44. J. Jefferson Bennett to Paul W. Bryant, November 12, 1965, in Bennett Papers, HSC.
45. Ibid.
46. Letter sent by Ralph Genito to junior college coaches throughout the nation, in Rose Papers, HSC.
47. Charles C. Collins to Ralph Genito, March 8, 1966, in Rose Papers, HSC.
50. Paul W. Bryant to Frank A. Rose and J. Jefferson Bennett, March 20, 1967, in Rose Papers, HSC.
54. Bryant and Underwood, Bear, 300.
56. Bryant and Underwood, Bear, 300-01.
57. Deford, "I Do Love the Football", 102.
60. Hennessy, interview by author, March 13, 1996. Hennessy remembers only one incident where there was friction between black and white players. "Coach Bryant got all the players together after the a game. He told the assistants to leave. There was some friction between some of the black and white players. None of the assistants knew it was going on, but Coach did. He had been around a long time. He told the players
to fix the problem. After that afternoon, there was no longer a problem."
61. Bryant and Underwood, Bear, 299.