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***Crimson and White Fields in the Black Belt:* The Integration of Intercollegiate Athletics at the University of Alabama**

This paper chronicles the racial integration of intercollegiate athletics at the University of Alabama from 1959 to the present day. Using presidential papers, interviews, black and white newspapers, and other primary source materials, the paper examines the role of Paul “Bear” Bryant and others involved in the desegregation of the athletic department at one of America’s most famous Southern institutions. What is immediately apparent from this analysis is that there were several factors that hindered the process of racial integration of intercollegiate athletics at the University of Alabama. Three distinct themes emerged as to why Alabama did not integrate its athletic fields until 1969.

These were as follows: the coaching culture within the university and the Southeastern Conference (SEC), university culture, and racial policy within the university and the state. The white football coaching culture within the SEC was resistant to integration because of self admitted ignorance and prejudice that they did not know how to treat and coach black athletes. The University of Alabama during the 1960s made allowances for competing against integrated teams but maintained a policy of recruiting white athletes only due to pressure from President Frank Rose and the Board of Trustees. For example, President Rose supported and apologized for a track coach who was recruiting only white track and field athletes during this period. The state policy on racial integration and busing in the public schools was another reason the athletic department was slow to integrate.

The University of Alabama and the mere mention of the state bring to mind a different image as the place where Governor George Wallace resisted integration at every turn, sometimes peacefully and at other times with violence. The negative image of Alabama as a state was and still is related to its resistance to integration. In 1963 the University of Alabama became the last public university to integrate its campus. Logically enough the University of Alabama athletic department was one of the last division one

programs to integrate its playing fields. Finally, this paper dispels some of the popular myths associated with the integration of the athletic department at the University of Alabama and makes a contribution to an understanding of the difficulties involved in changing policies in intercollegiate athletics even when it is the morally right thing to do.