

INTERCOLLEGIATE SPORTS

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Fumble 11: Coach Paul “Bear” Bryant on Trial for a Second Time

This paper presents evidence for the reasons and rationale for why Coach Paul “Bear” Bryant and the University of Alabama Athletic Department took eight years (1963-1971) to successfully integrate the athletic department following Governor George C. Wallace’s historic Schoolhouse Stand. Analysis consists of in depth archival material review, first person interviews, newspaper reviews, and secondary sources. During the past thirty years there have been a number of biographies and even one movie regarding Bryant and his legendary career. None of these characterizations have grappled with the issue of integration of the University of Alabama athletic program and Coach Bryant’s role in that process. Specifically, this research examines Bryant’s and Alabama’s recruitment efforts of Black student-athletes over a four-year period (1967-1971).

The process of integrating the University of Alabama athletic teams through this four-year period is discussed. Two key events occurred during this period of time that had significant influence on the eventual integration of Alabama athletics and Bryant’s inclusion of Black players to his football program, and an understanding of what actually occurred. The first event consisted of a civil suit filed by the African American Association against the University and Coach Bryant in 1969. Evidence during the pretrial meetings and the deposition given by Bryant, provide special insight into the actual integration efforts that existed at that time. Bryant’s testimony during his deposition, in particular, provides insight into his attitude and behavior regarding integration. The second event was associated with the University of Alabama vs. University of Southern California football game played in Alabama in 1970. This specific game has been a major source of explanation regarding the integration of Alabama athletics as defined by Bryant, his biographers, and the national media. It has also been a game shrouded in myth and half-truths

regarding the integration efforts of the University of Alabama Athletic department and “Bear” Bryant.
