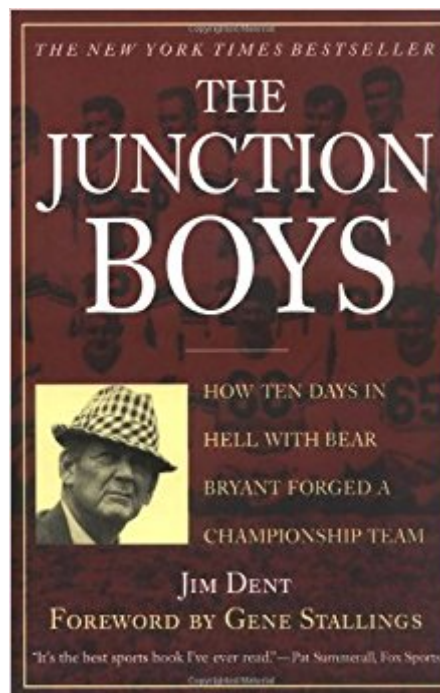




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# **The Junction Boys: How Ten Days In Hell With Bear Bryant Forged A Championship Team**



## Synopsis

The legendary Paul "Bear" Bryant is recognized nationwide as one of the greatest coaches ever. So why did he always cite his 1-9 A&M team of 1954 as his favorite? This is the story of a remarkable team--and the beginning of the legend. The Junction Boys tells the story of Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant's legendary training camp in the small town of Junction, Texas. In a move that many consider the salvation of the Texas A&M football program, Coach Bryant put 115 players through the most grueling practices ever imagined. Only a handful of players survived the entire 10 days, but they braved the intense heat of the Texas sun and the burning passion of their coach, and turned a floundering team into one of the nation's best. The Junction Boys is more than just a story of tough practices without water breaks. An extraordinary fellowship was forged from the mind-numbing pain. The thirty-five survivors bonded together like no other team in America. They profited from the Junction experience; the knowledge they took back with them to College Station, about themselves and what they were capable of, would be used for the rest of their lives. In vivid and powerful images reminiscent of Friday Night Lights, Hoosiers, and The Last Picture Show, these young men and their driven coach come to life. The Junction Boys contains all the hallmarks of a classic sports story, and it combines America's love of college football with an extraordinary story of perseverance and triumph.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When Bear Bryant took over the Texas A&M football program in 1954, he inherited a team that had lost its last five games by a combined score of 133-41. That season more than 100 Aggie hopefuls

arrived in the small town of Junction for the first practice of a now legendary training camp. The sun bore down. The drills escalated. Trainers doled out water like gold, and meals and accommodations were horribly spartan. Ten hellish days later, only 34 remained to form the 1954 team that would only win one game, but those survivors--and that's what they were--formed the nucleus of the squad that would go undefeated just two years later. This is the story of that team, that coach, the 10 days that shook their world, and the seasons they played together. "We lost alot (sic) of games," recalls Gene Stallings, who endured those days as a player and eventually followed Bryant as head coach both at A&M and Alabama, "but Coach Bryant knew what he was doing. Out of the yellow dust and the broiling heat of Junction, he forged a team of champions." Jim Dent's evocative recounting is so real and immediate you'll feel your throat getting scratchy as you read. You'll also feel remarkable respect for the players who toughed it out--and for Bryant, who begins as a man possessed, but, day after day, as he breaks the backs of some and helps instill true grit in others, transforms into a human being. --Jeff Silverman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

When Paul "Bear" Bryant left the University of Kentucky to take the reins of the Texas A&M football program in 1954, his legend was already approaching Texas-size proportions (almost 30 years later, Bryant became the winningest Division I coach of all time, with most of his victories coming at the University of Alabama). The problem: he knew he had inherited an awful team. Texas sportswriter Dent (King of the Cowboys) tells how Bryant turned the A&M program around. Over 100 boys rode in three buses out to the remote west Texas town of Junction and began grueling practices on cactus-riddled gravel in 110-degree heat, with no water. Ten days later, all but 34 had quit or simply run off. The team won just one game that season; two years later, however, A&M went undefeated. Dent has produced a richly evocative chronicle of the time and place, filled with bourbon-swilling, money-rolled alumni and every conceivable form of coaching sadism (Bryan deliberately broke one player's nose with his own forehead on the first day of practice). Culled from dozens of interviews with participants, Dent's text follows the players through the training camp, the team's eventual success and Bryan's continuing influence in their lives. Dent is a smooth storyteller, and he writes with a novelistic, often gritty touch. Though he does show Bryan paying for recruits, driven by pride and savagely attacking his players, he excuses Bryan's excesses as part of what it takes to build winning character. In the end, Dent gives readers a whooping celebration of the myth of Texas gridiron machismo. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I'm a youth football coach and it being the off-season, I've been reading and researching as much as I can to take some fresh ideas onto the field for next season. I stumbled upon a book written by Darrin Donnelly called "Think Like a Warrior" where a down-and-out coach encounters various "greats" of years past. One of those greats was Paul "Bear" Bryant. Aside from hearing his name tossed around, I didn't know who he was or what he was all about. Coach Bryant took 111 young men out to Junction, Texas for 10 days and only about 1/3rd of them stuck around for the full 10 days. The book details the camp that he ran during that time...but that's really only the beginning of the story. This book continues to tell the story of the young men who played for Bryant at Texas A&M. Their triumphs and their failures...and Bryant's as well. The game of football was much different than it is today in 2017...I'm referring to rules governing substitutions, offense/defense and what a coach was allowed to do on the sidelines. I'd recommend this book to anyone who is coaching the game of football or who is interested in the history of the game. Bear Bryant and the Junction boys are a notable group.

This has literally been on my wish list for three years! I'm an avid reader, a passionate fan of all things SEC, and a lover of well-written sports stories. (Rick Reilly, Sports Illustrated; Larry Woody, A Dixie Farewell). Dent is a popular sports writer, and clearly he has a vast collection of anecdotes won over drinks and cigars over the years. But I'm a journalist, and I have higher expectations than most. All that 'research' did not come together cohesively for this narrative. It was all interesting stuff -- I kept stopping to read a quote here and there to my husband, who is more connected to the generation in which the story was set -- but I was waiting for a storyline to appear, an outcome, a take-away message, some unique insight into Bear Bryant I had not heard previously. I read all but the last two chapters. The book has been on my nightstand for two months, since. I always finish books. I just can't bring myself to care about the ending. Concept is great, should be well-received by SEC and Bryant fans. Just really poorly executed. I'd love to see Junction Boys researched and re-written with a different author. My husband played high school football in the 1970s. Water was for sissies. Hydration? Did you take your salt pill? That's indicative of the time, not a failing of coaches then.

The story of the Junction boys, Bear Bryant's first team at Texas A&M, is Texas legend, almost mythology by now. It's a compelling story but one not done justice here. The author, Jim Dent, is addicted to cliché and writes like the sports guy at a small-town newspaper. But worse than the prose is the overall shallowness of the book. Dent, so intent on furthering the legend, never asks

any of the questions a normal person, much less a professional journalist, would ask. Bear Bryant was, famously, iconically, obsessed with character and discipline and toughness and staying power. That is, he was obsessed with his players having those attributes. Personally, he a) openly and admittedly cheated, paying for players, among other infractions b) couldn't remain faithful to his wife c) couldn't quit drinking or smoking and also had some gambling issues later in life. Dent never even wonders at the paradox, hypocrisy or irony of any of this. In the final chapter, Dent gives some details on players who went on to be professionally successful and who credited Bryant with making them so. Did these men also follow Bryant in that regard? Were they, too, professional successes with terrible character flaws? Dent doesn't say. Bryant also, at least as described in the book, had different rules and standards for different players. He waffled on his own rules right after making them. He endangered the lives of a few players, forcing them beyond exhaustion and heat stroke, while taking it easier on others. He comes across as capricious, almost crazy, more like Kim Jong Il than George Washington. The coach also comes across, at least at this stage of his career, as incompetent, handling his players poorly, playing them at positions for which they were ill-suited, altogether ignoring one great talent, possibly the best he'd ever see as a coach. I'm not a Bryant scholar, haven't read any of the biographies, and maybe some of those books would tell me more, but there's little in *The Junction Boys* to suggest that he was even half the coach he's reputed to have been. He seems to have been a great recruiter, albeit a crooked one. Maybe he won simply because he was able to load his teams with (often ill-gotten) talent. Of course he never coached in the NFL where recruiting is largely taken out of the equation and a coach has to be a master of the x's and o's. Dent never even tries to tell us what made Bryant's teams win. The other obvious thing Dent misses is: what about the seventy five or so players who quit the Junction training camp? Not one of those guys is interviewed, only the ones who stayed and loved Bryant and would be interested in furthering his legend. Bryant's legacy in terms of his influence on other coaches is another area left unexplored. His belief that 'toughness' was more important than speed or skill or execution or anything else was prevalent, even dominant for a long time, not so much at the collegiate or professional levels but definitely in high school football. I don't live in the South anymore and I'm not close to the high school football scene anywhere but I still read, every year or so, about a player being 'conditioned' to death during two-a-days. I know Bryant didn't start this sort of practice and he was never the only one doing it but he was the most prominent. How much of it still goes on and how much of that is still attributable to Bryant's influence is not entirely determinable but it would have been nice if Dent had looked at the issue. Again, though, this is a compelling story, one that's fascinated Texas and, really, the entire South, for a long time. I read this

book quickly, even with all its flaws. I just wish a better writer would have written it, some modern-day Melville maybe. It's pretty easy to see Bryant as Captain Ahab, standing out on the dusty practice field at Junction, Texas, getting crazier and crazier, driving his crew to ruin. Robert Penn Warren, who fashioned Huey Long into Willie Stark in *All the King's Men*, might also have been up to the task, having seen the way the tawdry and the grandiose co-exist, the way a great man can fall. But Dent's a newspaperman, not a poet, and his small talent fails this big story.

Dent's book about Bryant, his torture experience, and some other things is an OK sports book, but just OK. It is real thin, and as many such books do, contains a lot of supposedly verbatim conversations that the author could have not possibly known to be true. What I am a total loss to understand is how anyone could write or read this book and think Bryant was some sort of hero. He is a total loser. He is lucky he didn't kill some of his players, and even he admits some of his actions to run players off was wrong. Other sources on Bryant point out that he left a lot to be desired in the character category, something which the author didn't even address. Bryant took over a hundred athletes to Junction and came home with a couple of dozen. The author made no attempt whatsoever to interview any of the players that left the camp, reinforcing the absurd idea that a player who would rather live with all his body parts intact than pay homage to a sadist football coach did not deserve any credit. What's wrong with this book is not unlike what is wrong with much of college football still today. Win at all costs, even if it mean life threatening injuries. And, then they made a movie out of it ??????????????????

This was bought as a gift: the recipient loved the book. He is a big fan of Bear and Alabama.

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