

Junction thick of it as  
a player,



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Junction Boys Book Report                      “ losing doesn’t make want to quit. It makes me want to fight that much harder’, inspirational words as they were, usually to be able to come up with something to say that can transcend mental stimulation and awe and can be heard or read again in a future without the essence that they came from as opposed to the forgotten clutter of an otherwise useless and blurry yesterday is something that isn’t considered easy by any means as often times we never have the words for even one occasion we may find ourselves in but in doing so we’re left with nothing productive and at best choking from the knot in our throats caused by those words we couldn’t muster, or to some great words by Paul William “ Bear’ Bryant who wasn’t a stranger to what many consider great things much less words. Bear Bryant now better recognized for his achievements in college football, though he did pay his time on the field in the thick of it as a player, his success was found on the side lines as the head coach. Honors include six national championships , fourteen Southeastern Conference Championships, one Southwest Conference Championship, voted three time American Football Coaches Association Coach of the Year winner, twelve time recipient of the Southeastern Conference Coach of the Year award, a twenty five year stint at the University of Alabama as head coach, and on retirement held a record for most wins in collegiate football history with 323 wins, and all this only seems fitting of a man who could hold and parade in a sense the nickname of “ bear’, albeit earning said moniker that stuck for a lifetime from taking on a challenge posed to him by a carnival that offered one dollar for wrestling an actual bear but standing at six foot one and weighing in at one hundred and eighty pounds at the age thirteen surely must help or at least compliment his thirty six year span of influence, during

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which he molded teams in his image with a focus on aggressiveness and toughness, a standard determined from his own playing time gained from efforts such as playing against Tennessee with a broken leg, a legacy as a disciplinarian forged from creativity, word to word, sound to sound, and his first training camp with Texas A&M in a small desert town in Texas was made witness to his ideas and philosophy. The novel "The Junction Boys" written by Jim Dent tells a story about the aforementioned training camp which has now reached the height of legendary as for many it saved the institution's football program even though two thirds of the athletes he went in with did not survive the entirety of the extremely demanding training program. The front cover slogan of the book describes it best, "Hot ten days in hell with Bear Bryant forged a championship team". The very first sentence of the first paragraph on the first page of chapter one of the book is almost too revealing by introducing us to the bear himself and allowing us to see him for the first time with the quote "If you believe in yourself and have dedication and pride and never quit you'll be a winner.

The price victory is high, but so are the rewards" and through this we see not only a piercing look into the character and soul of Bear Bryant along with the reason he took on the job as head coach of Texas A&M in 1954 and why he put his "junction boys" through his grueling bootcamp. Right off the bat we see what will be a familiar tone of strictness, as Bryant meets his coaching staff and part of his team but with firmness to let everyone single member of his team know that he is nothing less than their boss and coach, first impressions are hard to repeat after all. Bryant was initially perceived as mean as he was almost disgusted by the Texas A&M's football program

recruitment, as it was made apparent that the school had been accepting more than one hundred boys for the past four years before his arrival and all it took to get in the team was be fortunate enough to be born in the state of Texas along with having some tie to the school either through family or liking. Bryant regarded many of the boys appearing severely out of shape to be playing collegiate football, stating “ Ain’t ever seen football players this bad”, “ Where in the hell’d they get these puke stains?”.

Despite all the terrible snaps and laughable attempts at blocking Bryant noticed his group players had flashes of brilliance over the first couple of practices thanks to certain individuals who he regarded as actually having good coaching at some point of their athletic upbringing and at the very least the want to be there and succeed, Bryant stated he was after a player with more heart than talent. Bryant also started to pick apart which type of people his players were, which one were starting scuffles and which were not, who contained a fighting spirit and which were polite, such as the case with Billy Schroeder who after a practice came up to Bryant and extended his pride in being able to play under Bear Bryant, as his reputation from coaching Kentucky preceded him, however at this point Bear Bryant over the course of a couple of initial practices and glimpses at his team has already began formulating the seeds of what would be his legacy and let Billy Schroeder know in the best way he could “ I Wouldn’t get to carried away, son. You might not feel the same after fall drills.”. It wasn’t up until an hour later after practice at a café that Bryant concluded his planning and informed his accompanying staff over bourbon what his intentions were “ There’s gotta be changes around here. I’m getting’ ready to cut the squad, to yank some boys

off the field.”. The rest of the book has each chapter beginning with a quote that dictates thought if nothing but words of wisdom.

The muscle of the team, the players themselves, are all too familiar, all people we relate to as we see ourselves in some of them or know of someone with an uncanny resemblance to, some of which had luckily caught on early to what Bryan was looking for in his starters going as far as to play through broken noses and running until exhaustion led them to pass out like Bobby Drakes, neglecting getting seen for ear infections that inhibits them from improving such as Bebes Stallings, inner strength was shown and did not go completely unnoticed how the commendable tenacity only raises the stakes over the course of that spring as Bear Bryant continues his shakedown of the football program and cutting players, posting his cut list up every afternoon and for the lucky few who spared for the day repeated the daily prayer of hoping their name was not on that list the following day. August thirty first around ten in the morning Bear Bryant had two buses on standby, which drew the players' suspicions as the practice field was only a walkable half mile away, and informed his players to grab a toothbrush, a blanket, a pillow, and a sandwich from the cafeteria as they were “ going on a little trip”. Bryant also made it clear to the players before departing the meeting that none of them were to speak of word of this to anybody but if they liked they can write a letter about leaving school once they got to their destination. The players' thoughts after the meeting can be placed under three categories, some were experiencing a thrill or a rush that similar to going on camping trip, others feared the worse and feared they were being taken to a religious camp or sorts, and lastly some didn't take Bear Bryant for one to

take fun trips or waste time and concluded they were on their way to a Bear styled boot camp.

They all crammed into two busses anyways. The drive found them driving from the side of greenfields that turned into piles sand and dried river bed, Bryant was of course taking his team to Junction, Texas a county that Bryant had fond memories of which he shared with the boys that only eased their suspicions and freight however he was unaware of the severe drought that had taken the land turning it into scorched land so hot that even with air conditioned buses the players were already drenched in sweat and fanning themselves with their own shirts. Bear was sold on the fact alone that the training ground was isolated away from distractions, fueled by anger of ignorance from not knowing about the drought, and determined to make a team out of his group of boys yet, later that night after card games and splashing in what can be considered a miracle of a lone river left in the town Bryant hinted to his players " Lights are goin' out in fifteen minutes. There will no more card games and no more splashin' in the water". The following day was inaugurated by slicing the dead of the morning with coaches whistles, yelling, and clatter of various items. Extremes were being noticed by players as they weren't allowed to have any breakfast bar or glass of orange juice, vitamins, salt tablets, a policy instated by Bryant as he feared eating a hearty breakfast would just leave the dry, weed less practice field covered in it, over the course of the day the players were not allowed to have water breaks to maximize the time Bryant had to get his team into shape.

Bryant figured some his boys were used to these harsh environments due to their prior service as some of them were taking advantage of their college

eligibility, and took great notice in players who kept playing past injuries, dislocated shoulders and broken backs alike it was Bryant's goal to sift out the players who wanted to be there, regardless of talent as he figured hard work will make up for it, he promised any one who would quit a bus ride home and the ability to keep their athletic scholarships given that they work odd jobs in the locker room for the team. Over the course of ten days in that fall training camp many players quit and took the free bus ride home, others were quit but did not take up the offer made by coach Bryant and found him to be so terrifying that they resolved it was easier to leave in the middle of the night providing for their own ride out of Junction. Athletes alike share the common trait of competitiveness and in a camp with nothing but it easy to see nobody like to lose, but apart of dealing with boredom from being in literally the middle of nowhere, dehydration and heat injuries, the boys had to learn about each other and work out problems if they were ever to be a team, a daunting task considering the psychological, and for some physical, image of Bear Bryant running their lives at the training camp. During the camp, sport reporters and writers who's job included to visit each teams training camp in order observe and rank the team based on their training in the preseason were astonished at how many fewer players Texas A had compared to other schools and the poor training conditions, even seeing some quit. All things considered the school was ranked to finish last in their conference. On day five of the training camp Bryant did not make training sessions any easier however he did give the team more freedom after practice to enjoy themselves as much as they could, in the end of the ten days he came back with half a bus full of players.

The start of the season came and to the expectations of many the team did not respond well

to the first game as it was believed the players were still tired from Junction despite the newfound sense of accomplishment, losing their opening game against rivals Texas Tech 41-9 and as a result the players had to train in the same jerseys they had just lost in with blood, sweat and all.

The rest of the season was not kind to Bryant and Texas A, Bear was not used to a losing season in which they won one game and lost nine. Other misfortunes fell as the school was found to have been breaking rules by giving recruiters money. Before playing SMU and not being able to sleep because of how cruelly he treated some of his players that some ended up in the hospital due to his methods he woke up the team for a meeting in which he explained how he came to be the man that is able to be their coach today revealing some of his past and why the team shouldn't quit despite their downfalls on the field, bestowing upon them a yellow capsule to keep and remind them to not quit and keep fighting. The following season was more productive on and off the field, to include integrating the school, formally a boys only school, and performance on campus by Elvish himself, winning a seven games and finishing second in the conference, and coincidentally the drought had ended in Junction with its first rainfall after a lengthy pause. Bryant was also found to have told each player what he admired about them before their big game with rivals Texas and the story of "The Junction Boys", at the end of said speech the remaining survivors of the training camp came up to Bryant with the yellow capsule they were given a long time ago.

In many ways this story had familiar themes that I'm able to relate to today, through the pains of growing up and joining the military. Some of the boys on the team had tragic tales and how or why they football, in my life if met <https://assignbuster.com/junction-thick-of-it-as-a-player/>



only a couple of people that have had similar events occur in their life and it's the reason they joined the military, to better their life or get away from something. Some of the boys had to deal with the decision of leaving their families and jobs to start this path of their lives in hopes it's the better option than staying put with their old jobs not knowing for certain if they'll succeed, being woken up at ungodly hours, being asked to push your limits, being put in a confined space with the same sex, people change, learning the line of respect and fear, how some people can become more than just their job title, and quitting never achieves improvement in any form, sacrifice and determination do. Change is natural and moves us in different directions very different than those we might expect, chapter fifteen quotes an excellent motto for this " When you make a mistake, admit it; learn from it and don't repeat it"- Paul Bear Bryant.