

This Day in History... September 11, 1913

Birth of Bear Bryant

Football star and coach Paul William "Bear" Bryant was born on September 11, 1913, in Moro Bottom, Arkansas.

Bryant received his nickname when he was 13 years old and had agreed to wrestle a captive bear for a carnival promotion. While his mother wanted him to be a minister, he knew he wanted to be a coach.

Standing at 6'1" when he was in eighth grade, Bryant joined his high school football team. By his senior season, he was playing offensive line and defensive end and helped his team win the Arkansas state championship.

Bryant went to the University of Alabama on a scholarship in 1931 and played end for their team, the Crimson Tide. In 1934, the team won the national championship. The following year Bryant played with a partially broken leg. In 1936, the Brooklyn Dodgers selected him in the fourth round of the NFL Draft, but he didn't end up joining the team because he wanted a career as a coach.

After accepting a coaching job at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, Bryant spent four years as assistant coach at the University of Alabama. During that time, the team earned a 29-5-3 record. He then went to Vanderbilt University as an assistant coach, though he did serve as head coach in a game when the regular coach was out for surgery.



Bryant put his career on hold to join the Navy during World War II.

In 1941, Bryant was offered the head-coaching job at the University of Arkansas. However, Pearl Harbor was attacked shortly after and he declined the offer so he could join the Navy. During World War II, he served off the coast of North Africa, but never saw combat action. However, when his ship was hit by an oil tanker, he emptied the forward fuel tanks, shifting the ship's ballast, and prevented it from sinking. For his actions he was awarded a Navy medal. Bryant was later given an honorable discharge and hired to train and coach recruits for the North Carolina Navy Pre-Flight football team.

Bryant had his first head-coaching job in 1945 at the University of Maryland. Though he led them to a 6-2-1 record, he butted heads with the school president and left after a year. Bryant then moved to the University of Kentucky where he coached for eight years. During Bryant's time there, the team made its first bowl appearance and won its first Southeastern Conference title.

In 1954, Bryant moved to Texas A&M University where he served as head coach and athletic director. During his time there, Bryant had an overall record of 25-14-2. Then, Bryant returned home to coach the Alabama Crimson Tide in 1958. It was here that Bryant achieved his greatest success. Coaching there for 25 years he built an impressive record, winning six national titles and 13 SEC championships.

Bryant earned a reputation as a demanding coach and a strict disciplinarian. His sense of fair play and his active interest in the players' lives outside of football, however, inspired his teams to do their best. Over the course of his career, he had a record of 323 regular season wins, 85 losses, and 17 ties, breaking the record at that time for the most victories.

Bryant had smoked and drank heavily for much of his life, leading his health to decline in the late 1970s. He then opted to retire after a rough season in 1982, stating, "This is my school, my alma mater. I love it and I love my players. But in my opinion, they deserved better coaching than they have been getting from me this year." After his final game, he was asked what he was going to do in retirement, and he replied, "Probably croak in a week." Four weeks later, he died of a heart attack on January 25, 1983. The Super Bowl held four days later included a moment of silence in his honor.

Bryant earned a number of awards and honors including 12 Southeastern Conference Coach of the Year awards, three national Coach of the Year awards (later renamed the Paul "Bear" Bryant Award), and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. A museum, hall, and stadium are named in his honor at the University of Alabama.



Issued at the Paul W. Bryant Museum in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.



Similar to the stamp above except it lacks the red bar over Bryant's name on the top right.

This Day in History... September 11, 1913

Birth of Bear Bryant

Football star and coach Paul William “Bear” Bryant was born on September 11, 1913, in Moro Bottom, Arkansas.

Bryant received his nickname when he was 13 years old and had agreed to wrestle a captive bear for a carnival promotion. While his mother wanted him to be a minister, he knew he wanted to be a coach.

Standing at 6’1” when he was in eighth grade, Bryant joined his high school football team. By his senior season, he was playing offensive line and defensive end and helped his team win the Arkansas state championship.

Bryant went to the University of Alabama on a scholarship in 1931 and played end for their team, the Crimson Tide. In 1934, the team won the national championship. The following year Bryant played with a partially broken leg. In 1936, the Brooklyn Dodgers selected him in the fourth round of the NFL Draft, but he didn’t end up joining the team because he wanted a career as a coach.

After accepting a coaching job at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, Bryant spent four years as assistant coach at the University of Alabama. During that time, the team earned a 29-5-3 record. He then went to Vanderbilt University as an assistant coach, though he did serve as head coach in a game when the regular coach was out for surgery.



Bryant put his career on hold to join the Navy during World War II.

In 1941, Bryant was offered the head-coaching job at the University of Arkansas. However, Pearl Harbor was attacked shortly after and he declined the offer so he could join the Navy. During World War II, he served off the coast of North Africa, but never saw combat action. However, when his ship was hit by an oil tanker, he emptied the forward fuel tanks, shifting the ship’s ballast, and prevented it from sinking. For his actions he was awarded a Navy medal. Bryant was later given an honorable discharge and hired to train and coach recruits for the North Carolina Navy Pre-Flight football team.

Bryant had his first head-coaching job in 1945 at the University of Maryland. Though he led them to a 6-2-1 record, he butted heads with the school president and left after a year. Bryant then moved to the University of Kentucky where he coached for eight years. During Bryant’s time there, the team made its first bowl appearance and won its first Southeastern Conference title.

In 1954, Bryant moved to Texas A&M University where he served as head coach and athletic director. During his time there, Bryant had an overall record of 25-14-2. Then, Bryant returned home to coach the Alabama Crimson Tide in 1958. It was here that Bryant achieved his greatest success. Coaching there for 25 years he built an impressive record, winning six national titles and 13 SEC championships.

Bryant earned a reputation as a demanding coach and a strict disciplinarian. His sense of fair play and his active interest in the players’ lives outside of football, however, inspired his teams to do their best. Over the course of his career, he had a record of 323 regular season wins, 85 losses, and 17 ties, breaking the record at that time for the most victories.

Bryant had smoked and drank heavily for much of his life, leading his health to decline in the late 1970s. He then opted to retire after a rough season in 1982, stating, “This is my school, my alma mater. I love it and I love my players. But in my opinion, they deserved better coaching than they have been getting from me this year.” After his final game, he was asked what he was going to do in retirement, and he replied, “Probably croak in a week.” Four weeks later, he died of a heart attack on January 25, 1983. The Super Bowl held four days later included a moment of silence in his honor.

Bryant earned a number of awards and honors including 12 Southeastern Conference Coach of the Year awards, three national Coach of the Year awards (later renamed the Paul “Bear” Bryant Award), and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. A museum, hall, and stadium are named in his honor at the University of Alabama.



Issued at the Paul W. Bryant Museum in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.



Similar to the stamp above except it lacks the red bar over Bryant’s name on the top right.