

All Guts and No Glory

Bill Elder

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As the recent film Glory Road reminded, the early desegregation of college sports often was neither easy nor pleasant. Here, Bill Elder recalls how he and a courageous group of white and black student-athletes broke racial barriers at a small college in northeast Alabama in the early 1970s. The setting was Sand Mountain, an area that four decades earlier had given rise to the Scottsboro Boys case, an area where racial attitudes for some had not changed much. Elder, recently retired from a successful career as a college sports administrator, shows vividly why he sometimes wondered whether he and his players would live through their experience. Abandoned by their school officials, the players faced constant threats and harassment and occasional violence. But they kept playing and winning games and forging bonds among themselves that lasted long after that first season was over. Through it all, Elder, an Alabama native and lifelong Baptist, watched his community with both a loving and an objective eye. His brief eyewitness account of both the worst and best elements of Southerners during this tumultuous era is compelling testimony.



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