



# Carry the Rock: Race, Football, and the Soul of an American City

*Jay Jennings*

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In 1957, nine African American teenagers faced angry mobs and the resistance of a segregationist governor to claim their right to educational equality. The bravery of the Little Rock Nine, as they became known, captured the country's imagination and made history but created deep scars in the community.

Jay Jennings, a veteran sportswriter and native son of Little Rock, returned to his hometown to take the pulse of the city and the school as the fiftieth anniversary of the integration fight approached. He found a compelling story in the school's football team, where black and white students came together under longtime coach Bernie Cox, whose philosophy of discipline and responsibility and punishing brand of physical football know no color. A very private man, Cox nevertheless allowed Jennings full access to the team, from a preseason program in July through the Tigers' final game in November.

In the season Jennings masterfully chronicles, the coach finds his ideas sorely tested in his attempts to unify the team, and the result is a story brimming with humor, compassion, frustration, and honesty. *Carry the Rock* tells the story of the dramatic ups and downs of a high school football season, and it reveals a city struggling with its legacy of racial tension and grappling with complex, subtle issues of contemporary segregation. What *Friday Night Lights* did for small-town Texas, *Carry the Rock* does for the urban south and for any place like Little Rock, where sports, race, and community intersect.

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