

Aflac Kickoff Game: Baylor vs. Auburn

Saturday, September 5, 2026

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Baylor Bears

Coach Dave Aranda

Postgame Press Conference



sideline, did you think maybe he had a chance to get in on it?

DAVE ARANDA: I thought he was in. You know, obviously when you hear the call, you know what the play is. So you're thinking -- you're watching for it and you see it, and I'm thinking it's a touchdown or it's points. For it not to be just sucks.

But yeah, there was no hesitation with that. We referenced the book and the book said to go for it. But it wasn't so much that. It was more of we had so many guys that were just doing everything they can to try to push through and close this game out. I just didn't feel playing longer was going to benefit us.

Q. You had 430 offensive yards, I think. Why were you not able to get more points out of a very good offensive performance?

DAVE ARANDA: Mistakes, that's why we lost. That's what I told the team was that early in the game there's too many opportunities that we had to close or to finish drives, to put points on the board, and we didn't do it.

I take the credit for that. I should have done a better job of coaching that. One of the things we talk about, more games are lost than won, especially early in the season. And I could have communicated that better because I think we contributed to that tonight.

Q. What were just your first impressions of the defense tonight?

DAVE ARANDA: They were who we thought they were. In spring and fall, that was them. So lot of pressure up front. A lot of tackles for losses and sacks, multiple sacks today. And then I think some of the pressure forced some throws that were eventually picked off. So I think it all starts up front for us. And it was good to see the active linebackers and safeties.

I thought the tackling. There was a few missed tackles on their sideline that I wish we would have taken back, but

Auburn - 17, Baylor - 16

DAVE ARANDA: Tough locker room in there. Everyone believed we were going to win. I did. And we fought to try to get that win. We have multiple guys that were injured in the game and were out of the game and then came back in to play and, so, fought to come back in. So guys were playing through pain, discomfort and all that.

That's one of the reasons for going for it. A bunch of guys getting Band-Aid up, and we had a chance to kind of close it out. We wanted to try to do that.

But way proud. The loss hurts. I think the belief throughout was that we were going to win, and so it's disappointing.

Q. What is the extent from DJ's injury? And how good was it to see him tough it out the rest of the game?

DAVE ARANDA: It's an ankle sprain as far as I know right now. A lot of the fourth downs and the short yardage and all these things, we had both packages of kind of DJ runs, and then really a lot of running in the game.

He hurt himself. I think prior to hurting, two called runs. There was a fair amount of runs in this game that were called. And, so, him going out or him being hurt really cut that down. And we had to go to another package for the third-and-short and the fourth-and-short calls.

So I credit Spav for mining those calls and getting kind of deep into the book to be able to do that because I thought DJ being able to play through pain and fighting through and pushing off and doing all those things, I thought was tremendous and inspiring.

Q. You mentioned some of the thinking behind going for two. Was there ever any hesitation at all to do that? And then in the moment, did you think, from the

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outside of that, I thought it was clean for the first game.

Q. You mentioned the offensive line before coming into this game, how they had improved a lot since the spring. Do they need to take a step further?

DAVE ARANDA: Yeah, I thought they improved throughout the game. I thought there's times we needed three yards or four yards in runs and they got it. And it was great to see Dawson -- to have Dawson Pendergrass back is such a gift for us. He has a knack of finding a crease and finding a seam and falling forward. He always falls forward.

So they really found a rhythm in the second half. I think there's a lot of confidence that they can take from this game. But they continue to improve.

This team has the potential to be a really, really gritty team and a really tough team and the grittiest and the toughest team since I've been here. And they've got the potential to do that.

I go in the locker room and the leaders, our captains, are coaching guys up and are saying all the things that I'm about to say. So they're already saying it prior to me saying it. So it can be a special group. We need to get a win though.

Q. You had another fourth-down decision earlier in the game where you turned down, I think, a 32-yard field goal, something like that. Did you like the setup there, or were you worried a little bit about the field goal unit after he missed that first one?

DAVE ARANDA: No, we'll go off a number if there's a number that is in a book that says, hey, this is fourth and whatever that number is is a green light to go. And so it's not 100 percent on that because there's times where we don't do that.

But I just felt like we were going to need touchdowns. I didn't think that field goals were going to do it. And I think it was going to their band, it was going that way -- the one you're talking about? And so in games -- I remember succinctly feeling in that instance is that the defense is holding on, they're making stop after stop after stop. And to continue to ask them to get those stops -- there's ways you can think about it. Can you get three and does that hold, or do you get the seven and be able to pull away? So I was thinking the seven.

Q. Back in '21, you guys were on the winning side of a game where one yard short. Obviously, today on the other side of that. Describe that gamut of emotions?

DAVE ARANDA: Yeah, it sucks. We were talking about it in there. I mean, in practice now we can say is that the type of effort that's going to be half a yard short or is that the type of effort that's going to get it over the line. So there's a fair amount that we can do with that. But in the moment, it sucks pretty strong.

Q. How impressed were you with Gavin Freeman in his kind of debut for y'all?

DAVE ARANDA: He's been who we thought he was. He's been like that ever since the beginning. What's cool about Gavin is he's taken ownership of the team. Gavin's one of the guys, just his life story and his family and his upbringing and his high school and college career, just everything that he's done and how he's lived his life -- if Gavin Freeman was a football team, you're backing him because that team's going to win. That team's going to win.

So to get the Gavin Freeman of the world to own this team, to put it on his back and say, hey, this is my team and to lead it that way is way special for us. And I think we'll transform into what you see.

Because he's that way. There's countless clips of him being dependable. If you were to tell me on a fourth and whatever he'd make an amazing catch to move the chains, I would not hesitate to believe you because he's done that countless times.

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