

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Baylor Bears Dave Aranda Press Conference

DAVE ARANDA: It's good to see everybody. I'm blessed and humbled to be here before you all.

I'm excited about this group of players and the staff that we've put around them. There has been an edge in our building since January, and it's been healthy. It's been way evident. There's a belief that we're going to win, and that's cool to see.

The support from our administration -- we have Jovan Overshown who's here, that's our deputy AD; and our athletic director, Mack Rhoades -- it's just been so strong, and to invest in us and put us in a position to win. I can feel that momentum, and I can feel that backing, and I'm energized by it.

I've seen the media poll and kind of where we are predicted to finish, and so I'm excited to prove that wrong. I think in the past, past couple years, we've done that pretty successfully, both ways. So excited to get to work and to prove that we're a better team than what we are perceived as.

With that, I'll take any questions that you guys got.

Q. This is kind of a simple question, but what happened last year, with seven or eight months to think about it?

DAVE ARANDA: I look at the lessons from last year showing up in the moves that we made this year. We're fully invested now in the transfer portal. We're fully invested with name, image, and likeness. I'm fully invested in football, which I think is probably the number one thing.

I think those things just moving forward, man, just put us in position to be so much a better team. There's just an energy around the building that I think shows that.



I think you talk to any of our kids, they feel that. Like I say, I'm excited to get started.

Q. You just got to Baylor, got off to a hot start. Things changed quickly. How has this senior class kind of navigated leadership and accountability, and how has it spread throughout the freshmen and sophomores?

DAVE ARANDA: They have seen the good and the bad. They've seen what works and what doesn't work.

I think of Matt Jones when you ask that question. Matt is with us today. I just think of -- like there's a burning desire in Matt to put his best foot forward, to win ballgames, and to really show that all the things that we're about is important, but we're winners, too, and that winning is important.

We're going to go out and do that. I think -- I feel that from our leaders and our veterans, and when the players lead in that way, it makes your job as a coach that much easier.

Q. Every year this is kind of your first chance to tell fans and media what's different about this team compared to last year, but this one feels like it has a little bit more significance, at least in terms of the pressure of getting the job done. What's different about this year's team and what's going to be different than a 3-9 season?

DAVE ARANDA: I think the moves that we've made, I think, illustrate it. I think the use of the transfer portal. I think offensive line-wise, we're really able to bring in some people that can contribute and can help shore up a group that really shouldn't have been playing. They were too young to play and should have used the portal the year before.

Then I think there's -- recruiting is continuing to this time. It's throughout today, recruiting is still going on. So having the NIL money to win some of these recruiting battles and close it out, whereas a year ago that was not the case.

I think those are two big changes.



I think the biggest change is just being involved with football, with myself. I just think I am at my best when I am all the way through a technique or all the way about a scheme, all the way to the depths of it. And then when I come back up, I can speak really strongly about it and I can own it. And then if it don't look right, I can get mad at it and get it so it's right. And that's a big change.

I think that echoes throughout our building. So I'd say those three things.

Q. With bringing in Coach Spavital, can you talk about what he's going to bring to the offense and how you approached the transfer portal to run his offense?

DAVE ARANDA: Yes. I think he's going to maximize the gray. I think he's going to allow our speed and our skill to play fast. Whereas maybe something had to be done -- and there are still things that have to be done this certain way and this block has to occur this certain angle with this certain foot up, with this certain hand placement.

But I think the ability to say, hey, we're going to run a choice route and if they're up, we're going to settle down; if they're low, we're going to take the top off; if they're out, we're going to bend it in. And to be able to have those type of markers where a quarterback and a receiver can get in sync and then have tempo where stuff is happening fast and you're on the ball fast and have really wide splits to where you feel like you're isolated, where it's just you and the defender and there's nobody else in the area code that's near you, I think all of those things add to points and add to confidence in offense.

I think the ability to bring people in that fit that, that can play in space, that have the ability to play slot, the ability to play on a No. 1 receiver, either the Z or X, but be a match-up problem, could be a tight end, tight body, I think those are all things we were able to address in the portal to help the offense.

Q. With you taking on more of that nitty-gritty role and Coach Spavital focusing more on offense, how do you stay focused on those big-picture responsibilities that come with the job, and how difficult has that transition been for you?

DAVE ARANDA: It's been a lot. I think that the style of coaching that I've done just with defense is, like, full immersion into it. And that's hard to do when you have another job. So to try to balance that out and to get that to where you can be an effective leader is really the thing I'm working through right now.

I rely on the team that we have, the coaches and the

leadership with our staff. And we'll plan things out, talk things as they come. And then if there's things that need addressing, to be able to kind of sit down and really talk through all of it and put a plan together of, hey, this is how we did it in the past, is this an autocorrect thing or does this need a new way to look at it? So all of those things kind of snap me back into it.

But I think one of the fears, I know in the past I wasn't involved on defense, and one of the fears when I took this job was that I would be walking down the hall and someone would be walking the other way or walking towards me, and it would be a player or it would be a staff member or a wife of a staff member or someone, and I wouldn't recognize them or I wouldn't acknowledge them. I'd just be so lost in whatever, football.

I can do that. I've been known to do that. So I didn't want to do that here.

I think there's got to be some -- I'm counting on some growth from the person that I was to this version of it where we can balance that out better.

Q. Talk about the receiver depth, specifically Ashtyn Hawkins coming from Texas State, he already played under the new OC, so what new look does that bring to this offense?

DAVE ARANDA: He is a mismatch just in terms of linebackers covering him. He's got the ability to have the in and out and the twitch, side to side, but I think what makes him different is the acceleration and the top-end speed to close it out. So he's got both.

Sometimes the quick guys aren't necessarily the fast guys, and he's got both of those things.

I think the thing that really defines him is that he ain't in it to lose. He's in it to win, and then kind of put it in your face after he wins.

So all of that can't help but come out of him, and I think that's been a welcome addition to our team.

Q. You were one of the innovators on defense kind of using a 32 split, coming from a 44 background. With coaches like Dave Clawson using the slow mesh at Wake Forest, and then Kendal Briles who uses play action, are offenses doing a better job now recognizing the plus-one defender when they're facing a secondary plus-two, and how do you counteract that as a defensive coach?

DAVE ARANDA: Yes, I think they are, and I think, as an



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example, we used to -- there was a couple years ago, 2014, 2013, we would play what we call a red hammer, where if it was twins out there, two receivers, we'd have a nickel and an apex and a safety would be on No. 2, and if 2 ran an out, he'd match it; and if 2 ran vertical, he'd match it; if 2 was under the linebacker, he would zone the quarter.

So we're playing quarters over there, but it's really kind of manage quarters, and the nickel, the overhang, he would play kind of the quarterback role. He'd play quarterback on his own read, and then the linebacker would be inside but would push outside and play the C gap for the dive. So you'd have two for two. And then any type of throw, you've got leverage on it with the safety.

Red hammer is best if you can gain, beg, and borrow the backside safety. Say there's a tight end that blocks, and you can get the safety -- you're begging and borrowing to play cover three in a lot of ways.

You can't really do that anymore with the mismatches and the vertical throws and all of it. So now we play a version of, hey, it's going to be like a read or a palms, if it's a run action and a pass, but if it's a pass action, so it's not a run read or a run look, but it's a drop-back pass, then we play it like true quarters where the nickel will play 2 on the out. If 2 is on the out and it's a run read, he's playing run, the DBs handle it. If it's a pass read, the nickel will then match the two. So we can double 1 or use the safety high to help with something else.

That's an example of where, hey, there's a move, there's a countermove, there's always another move.

The other thing I would say with that would be the ability to run creepers and pressure out of two high safety, whereas before you did a lot of that as single high, so now doing it out of 2 high I think helps your base 2 high looks because there could be movement, there could be edge pressure, and I think the variation helps keep the O-line honest in terms of targeting and in terms of violence coming off the ball.

Q. With Texas leaving the conference, can you talk about the importance of keeping those in-state rivalries alive?

DAVE ARANDA: Yeah, I think the regionality aspect of college football has always been important. I think it's probably just not important enough when there's money involved like the money is involved I think is the bottom line. So I think to try to maintain those rivalries that people love and have grown up with is important.

It's really good to see that our league is fighting to do that.

I think when you asked the question, what immediately comes to my mind is this is a vital time, and I know everyone else in our league thinks the same way, for Baylor, or whatever team you support, to take the charge of the league, to take that step, because it's wide open right now.

I think the opportunity that's in front of us is not going to be there for long, so I think there needs to be a team that takes command and kind of leads the charge, so to speak. We need Baylor to be that team.

Q. Two years ago you had about six guys drafted. When you look at this roster, and last year you talked about you went 3-9, you hit the portal, guys probably shouldn't have been playing, but they got experience regardless. Do you see that same number of guys possibly revealing themselves? And then the second question, has RG3 and other past Baylor greats, Nick Florence, have they brought themselves back around the program and said, How can we help?

DAVE ARANDA: They have, yeah. To answer the second part of your question, they have. And it's always humbling for me when that takes place. I'm just way appreciative of it. There's a love for Baylor coming from former players. We want as many former players as possible to come back and to be around, to be at practice, to be around the team.

I think of all the things - you're talking about winning and the championships and the education and all of it - but of all the things that's the most impressive about Baylor to me is meeting the former players and seeing the people that they've become, the husbands, the fathers, the businessmen, how successful they are, and just the way they move through society and treat other people. It's inspiring to me.

To have them around our team is a win-win.

We've got good players on our team. What we need to do is come together and play as a team to win, and then the draft and the next level and all that will come to them. And so I think first things first is let's come together as a team, decide this is what we want to do, let's do it, and then see what comes from it.

Q. You created a little buzz this morning with an interview with SicEm earlier where you talked about what it takes in recruiting, paying players. Just wanted to ask you about the NIL piece and what Baylor has done maybe over the last year to kind of increase that and how that has helped you in recruiting.

DAVE ARANDA: In the past, and I mean, this part still holds true today, I've always felt really strong about our recruiting visits, our official visits, our visits of any kind, any type of interaction. The feedback from the parents has been, hey, this is authentic, real people. These are people that are going to be mentors to my son. These are people that care about his education. These are going to be people that aren't going to abandon my boy when things get hard. These are people that are going to see him still and work to get him back up where he needs to be.

So that's always been that, and it still is that now. It's that in today's climate, that's not enough. That hasn't been enough.

I think that was really kind of the story of last year in a lot of ways, last year's recruiting, that it wasn't enough. Now with the money part of it, and I know it's still shocking for people to hear it, but there's certain guys you recruit and the money part is kind of how maybe we as a general consensus kind of -- it's shocking to hear it. There's some people that recruit that it's like that. But the higher ranking guy you go, it is not like that at all. It's like, that's the expectation to get into the thing. Then once you get into the thing, it's an escalator to try to win the thing.

So I think you have to say yes to that because that's where it's at.

The balance is to be that and then not lose who you are and to not lose the relationships, not lose the authenticity and being genuine and really caring because we talk about buying players, what you don't want to do is make it so it's so transactional that that's what it is, you're buying and discarding and off and on.

I feel like, yeah, that's the challenge.

As coaches we're trying to get the best recruiting class, but really what we're doing is trying to be transformational and transactional all the way act.

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