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Baylor finishes season fifth overall

By JEFFERY SWINDOLL
SPORTS WRITER

At the start of the 2014 season, Baylor head coach Art Briles casted a vision for his team. Briles made it clear that Baylor football is gunning for a repeat of winning the Big 12 Conference title, no excuses.

As the season went on, and the Bears garnered a bigger and bigger national spotlight each week. The inaugural College Football Playoffs were looming large in the back of everyone's mind. Members of the media constantly asked the bears questions about the playoffs, making it impossible for the Bears to dodge the issue. Briles and his players did the best they could to not put the cart before the horse. First thing was first: without a conference title, a college football playoff berth was out of the question. Briles knew it. His players knew it. The Big 12 title was the be all, end all for the Bears in 2014.

Baylor's 2014 Big 12 campaign was a nine-round heavyweight fight. Repeating a championship, in the Big 12 especially, is extremely difficult, Briles said.

"That's why Seattle is struggling a bit this year," Briles said. "The Pac-12, The Big 10 and the SEC, those people are having new champions. The Big 12 and the ACC repeated. It's tough to do. Last year it was a thrill, it was exciting, it was hopeful, and this year, it's like what I was saying, we got the windows rolled up and the doors locked because someone is trying to get to us and you know, we're not taking jabs, we're taking haymakers. They're trying to knock us out."

Weeks before the season kicked off, the Big 12 showcased their brand new logo and, most notably, their slogan — "One true champion." Ironically, the Big 12 is the only 'Power 5' conference without a championship game. Furthermore, the Big 12 ended up having two champions this season, not one.

Although the speculation and controversy at the national level shrouded Baylor's accomplishments this season, it was a historic year for the Bears. Amidst the media mayhem, the Bears had a tough season of conference competition to play. The Bears would end up as the centerpiece of college football's biggest debate of the season, but their journey started out intimately, without much care for the national picture.

The 2014 season began as a



SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

Senior nickelback Collin Brenne, senior quarterback Bryce Petty and senior inside receiver Clay Fuller celebrate their 38-27 win over Kansas State and Baylor's second Big 12 Championship in a row. The Bears finished the season fifth in the College Football Playoffs rankings and will play Michigan State in the Cotton Bowl on Jan. 1.

celebration of Baylor's settlement in the top 25 and the growth of its once below average program. This would gradually evolve into an expose of Baylor's exploration of the dark unknown that looked to be a potential final four finish and a spot in the national championship for much of the season.

For the first time ever, Baylor would open its season as the defending Big 12 champion, which just happened to be the same year the Bears would debut their pristine new palace on the Brazos, McLane Stadium. Overall, McLane was nothing short of a success. The waterfront view and 'sailgating' were notable additions to the Baylor game-day experience, but the greatest victory of the new stadium was a matter of continuing a three-year trend in Baylor football.

"You can't find a better stadium in the United States of America to play a football game on the Brazos River with the bridge that we have

and the atmosphere," Briles said. "It's a big thrill, a great privilege, and I'm very thankful to be a part of it."

The Bears simply do not lose at home. Even against ranked opponents, the Bears are tried and true at home. This season, the Bears played two of the hardest home games in all of college football. It would not take long for the Bears' grit at home to be tested. After spending a month on the road to start the season, including a 28-7 win over Texas in Austin, the Bears faced their bitter rivals, No. 9 TCU, at McLane Stadium on Oct. 11.

What occurred on that day in Waco shattered expectations and would later serve as the single most discussed game in the College Football Playoff controversy. With 11 minutes left in the game, Baylor overcame a massive 21-point lead to topple TCU thanks to late-game heroics from senior quarterback Bryce Petty and freshman kicker

Chris Callahan's 28-yard field goal as time expired. By this point, you have to have lived under a landslide of rocks to not know the score of that game. 61-58.

After beating a conference heavyweight in TCU, the Bears faltered in Morgantown, W. Va., losing 41-27. Penalties bombarded the Bears who scored a season-low in points scored and total offensive yards against the Mountaineers. In addition, the Bears entire right side of the offensive line (senior tackle Troy Baker and junior guard Desmine Hilliard) suffered season-ending injuries in Morgantown. Repeating as Big 12 champions would have to be done without one of the team's most vocal leaders and pound-for-pound best players.

A loss to their name made the Bears' campaign for another championship an even greater challenge to be faced in games against the likes of Oklahoma on the road and Kansas State in the season finale.

The Bears had not won a game in Norman, Okla.; ever. Petty made sure of that not sticking for much longer. The fifth-year senior arguably played his best career game on that day against the Sooners. Briles dubbed Baylor's 48-14 thrashing of Oklahoma the best road win in the country this season.

Petty, who struggled in the early going of the season with streaky play, silenced his critics, completing 32 of his 42 pass attempts, totalling 387 yards and a touchdown. Petty really was "ready for OU" -- a phrase that he repeated in the post-game press conference after the Bears' 60-14 victory over Kansas.

Baylor's playoff campaign was picking up steam after a statement win over the No. 15 Sooners. The Bears went on to take care of business against Oklahoma State at home, and somehow managed to escape AT&T Stadium with a 48-46 win over Texas Tech in Arlington. Meanwhile, the College

Football Playoff committee was being put in a harder position. All the teams in the CFP top six kept on winning, but Baylor was riding in the back seat for the playoff race.

Tension rose to an all-time high after the selection committee placed TCU at No. 3, Ohio State at No. 5 and Baylor at No. 6 in the final week of the regular season. The Bears would need a win against No. 9 Kansas State and then some help to even have a chance at being in the final four. Debate broke out all across national sports media, and Baylor was front and center.

The talking heads were at it all week while the Bears were on the practice field and in the film room, working towards another Big 12 Championship. The Bears were playing with frustration, hope and desire at this point. Most of all was desire, and the thing they desired the most was a Big 12 championship.

Winning back-to-back conference titles, whether that be with the uncomfortable "co-champion" label or not, is tremendous feat, Briles said. The Bears believed that, in and of itself, a Big 12 title would be a sufficient argument to be in the playoff. Baylor did just that.

"We feel like [Briles] has led one of the greatest turnarounds in college football history," Director of Athletics Ian McCaw said. "To be in a position where Baylor is playing for back-to-back Big 12 championships, it speaks to the incredible job he has done and the quality of our football program. Baylor will be a force to be reckoned within the Big 12 and nationally for years to come."

The Bears handily defeated the Kansas State Wildcats 38-27, securing the Big 12 title for the second year in-a-row. Baylor became only the second school ever to win back-to-back Big 12 titles (Oklahoma 2006, 2007). Regardless of Baylor being left out of the national final four, Petty is keeping things in perspective.

"It's great [to be back-to-back Big 12 champs], it really is," Petty said. "I am so proud of every one of those guys in the locker room. There's something about a brotherhood. When you work so hard with each other, offseason, summer condition and fall camp, you've got a common goal that everybody is so committed to and then you reach that goal, and it happens, it's the greatest feeling in the world. And I couldn't be more happy than of the guys I am doing it with."



KEVIN FREEMAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

An inside view of the Bears' first football game at McLane Stadium against Southern Methodist University on Aug. 31. The Bears won 45-0.



LARIAT FILE PHOTO

The Bears moved to McLane Stadium from Floyd Casey Stadium at the beginning of the semester. The team was undefeated at home in 2013 and 2014, the only school to do so at two different venues.

McLane Stadium a great success after first season

By JEFFERY SWINDOLL
SPORTS WRITER

The most monumental development for Baylor football in recent years has been the addition of the \$266 million McLane Stadium.

Concerns about the stadium's parking, the new ticketing system for students and its reduced size from Floyd Casey Stadium were ubiquitous in the weeks leading up to the opening kickoff at McLane Stadium.

With its first season in the books, student attendance rate at an all-time high, an undefeated record at home and a second-straight Big 12 Championship, McLane

Stadium has proven to be a huge success for Baylor University.

Baylor head coach Art Briles had nothing but praise for the new stadium experience ahead of the season. More than anything, Briles was looking forward to the advantage the stadium would bring in winning football games. That is really what it all comes down to, Briles said.

"What I need to do as a coach, and what we need to do as a football team is understand that we have a job to do," Briles said. "Our job is to take care of the people that cared enough to make all of this happen."

Briles made sure his team's pri-

orities were left intact, of which were to keep winning at home and, most of all, win another Big 12 championship. Since 2011, no school has a better home record than Baylor (25-1). Baylor and Florida State were the only two schools in country to not have a single loss at home in the past two years. Baylor was the only team in the country to do it at two different home venues each year.

Going undefeated at home is one thing. Going undefeated at home and successfully defending the Big 12 title is a much harder thing to do, Briles said. As the defending Big 12 champions, the Bears had to take haymakers, not

jabs in 2014, Briles said.

"We have three top-nine teams with Kansas State [Baylor and TCU]," Baylor Director of Athletics Ian McCaw said. It is an incredibly competitive year for the Big 12. I think it speaks to the fact that you do not have to have the largest enrollment, you do not need to have the biggest budget to be successful in college football and both Baylor and TCU have proven that."

The Bears won the all-important Big 12 championship. As Vince Lombardi once said, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." However, it doesn't hurt to have all the bells and whistles to go with it.

"From a spectator's point of view, it's got everything you want," freshman linebacker Taylor Young said. "You've got wi-fi, replays, the big screen, and it's just an awesome atmosphere."

Baylor football's focus was to bring another Big 12 championship to the university and its supporters. The university's focus was to give fans the absolute best college football experience in America. From 'sailgating' to high-speed wi-fi, McLane Stadium is unparalleled, Briles said. It made the transition from Floyd Casey to McLane much easier, junior offensive tackle Spencer Drango said.

"There's a whole bunch of tra-

dition of history and tradition at Floyd Casey, but we get to make the history at McLane. That's the fun thing about it. Not many people get to do that. We get to start the 'we don't lose at McLane,' and that's our goal. Floyd Casey was nice, but McLane is just... I can't put one thing on it."

Leftover student tickets are now a thing of the past for Baylor football. In addition, leftover seats anywhere for a Baylor football game are rare nowadays. Fans expect wins from the Bears at home now, and they get to see it in what Briles considers is, without question, the best college football stadium in America — McLane Stadium.

No. 5 Baylor prepares for Cotton Bowl showdown with No. 8 Michigan State

By SHEHAN JEYARAJAH
SPORTS EDITOR

Baylor might have been just on the outside looking in at the playoff chase, but the Bears still have an opportunity to make waves with a bowl game in the 2015 Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic against No. 8 Michigan State on New Years Day.

"For me, being a Texas guy growing up in the state of Texas and playing in the Southwest Conference, that's the only bowl that existed," head coach Art Briles said. "I mean, you're going to the best bowl around."

The Bears were kept out of the playoff this year by No. 4 Ohio State, a Big 10 opponent. The Buckeyes' signature win was against this Michigan State team on the road.

"I haven't really had a chance to study Michigan State yet, but I just know they've been very good the last couple of years. They were the defending Big 10 Champions this year," Briles said.

Michigan State is the highest ranked team in the country with zero ranked wins, but the Spartans have the ability to challenge opponents in several different ways.

Teams coached by Michigan State coach Mark Dantonio have become known for stifling defense, and this year's rendition is no different. MSU ranked No. 7 in total defense, No. 12 in scoring defense and No. 6 in rush defense.

The Spartans allowed more than 22 points only one time this season in a win, and that was only when Purdue scored two touchdowns late in the fourth to make it a closer game than expected.

Michigan State has also shown an offensive diversity that was lacking in 2013. The Spartans rank No. 22 in rushing yards with 234.9 per game, just behind Baylor's 235.2. Running back Jeremy Langford is the workhorse of the group with 1,360

rushing yards and 19 total touchdowns.

Quarterback Connor Cook does not put up gaudy numbers in the Big 10, but has been a consistent threat for the Spartans. Cook has thrown for over 200 yards in nine of 12 games, including a combined 701 passing yards in Michigan State's games against ranked opponents.

Michigan State played Oregon earlier in the season, a similar threat to what Baylor poses. Oregon was able to attack Michigan State's defense in both aspects of the game. The Spartans allowed 491 yards to the Ducks.

Perhaps more importantly, the Ducks held Langford to only 86 yards on 3.6 yards per carry in the 46-27 win on Sept. 6.

Many of the same issues came up against Ohio State in Michigan State's second loss on Nov. 8. The Buckeyes were able to put up 300 passing yards and 268 rushing yards in the 49-37 victory.

Baylor's best chance to beat Michigan State will be to turn this game into an offensive battle. Despite improvements, Baylor's offense is significantly more productive than MSU's.

The Spartans only faced prolific offensive performances twice this season, and struggled to keep up. In wins, the Spartans allow only 14.4 points per game. In losses, that number balloons to 47.5 points per game. Baylor has the ability to post those kind of lofty numbers.

Baylor is playing angry. Head coach Art Briles and his team were unhappy to be left out of the College Football Playoff, especially to a Big 10 opponent who lost to Virginia Tech at home.

However, the Bears can show the world they belonged in the playoff chase with a convincing win over the Spartans.

No. 5 Baylor will kick off against No. 8 Michigan State at 11:30 a.m. on New Years Day at AT&T Stadium in Arlington. The game will be televised nationally on ESPN.

US VS. THEM

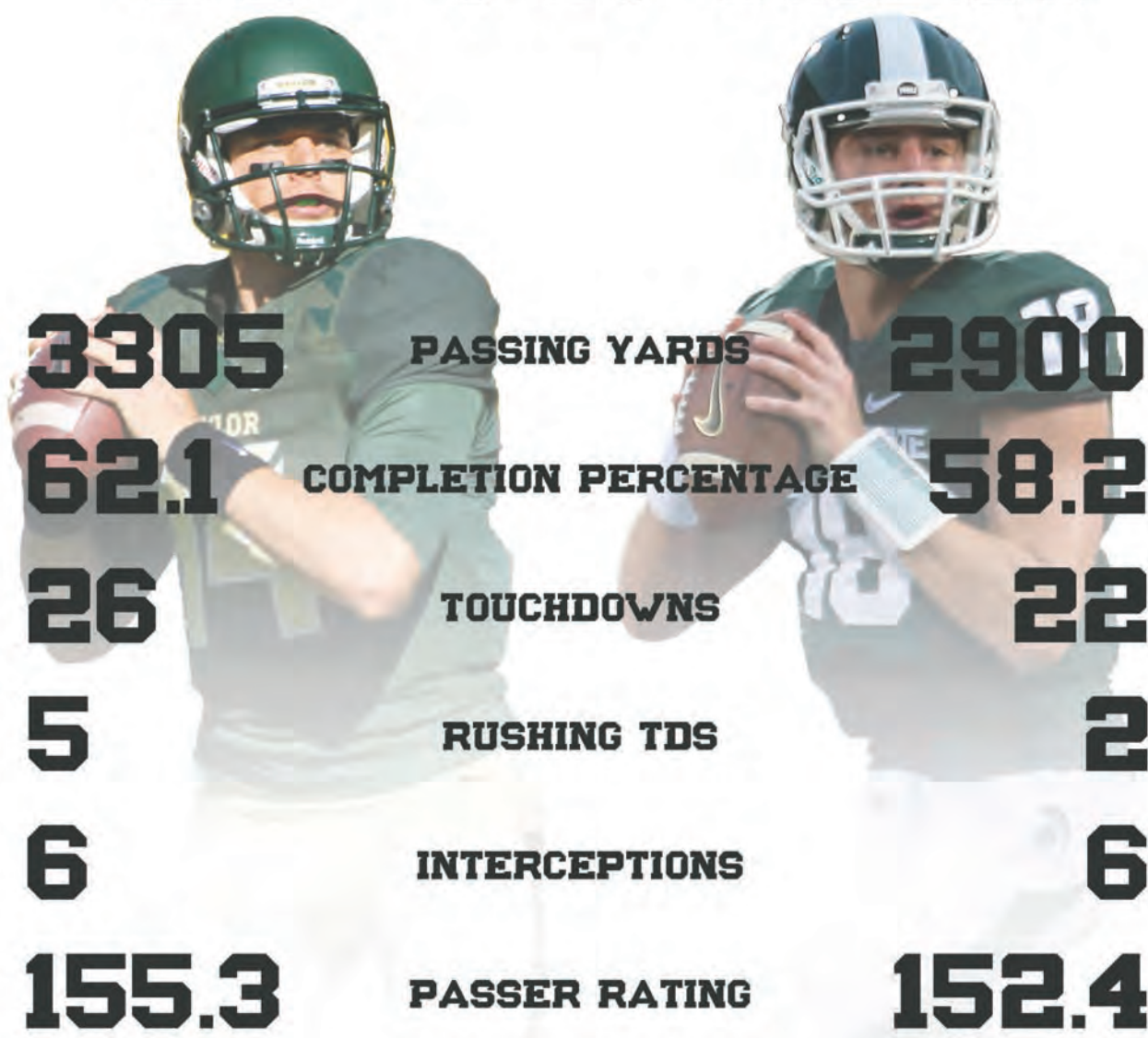


Photo illustration by Kevin Freeman | Lariat Photographer



JARRAD HENDERSON | DETROIT FREE PRESS

Michigan State running back Jeremy Langford rushes up field during the second quarter against Indiana at Spartan Stadium in East Lansing, Michigan, on Saturday, October 12, 2013. Michigan State won, 42-28.



SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

Senior quarterback Bryce Petty hands off the ball to sophomore running back Shock Linwood during Baylor's 61-58 win over No. 6 TCU on Oct. 11. The Bears will play Michigan State in the Cotton Bowl on New Years Day.



Quick Facts

- ✦ **The Cotton Bowl was originally at Cotton Bowl Stadium in Dallas, Texas, from 1937-2010.**
- ✦ **Baylor has been to the Cotton Bowl twice as a member of the Southwest Conference.**
- ✦ **The Big 12 Conference is 5-13 when playing in the Cotton Bowl since 1997.**
- ✦ **The Cotton Bowl is sponsored by Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company.**
- ✦ **The Cotton Bowl is one of six bowl games selected by the College Football Playoff Selection Committee.**

Look back at Cotton Bowl Classic

By JEFFREY SWINDOLL
SPORTS WRITER

The Cotton Bowl is one of the most storied bowl games in all of college football. Since its inaugural year in 1937, the Cotton Bowl has featured some of college football's greatest teams and games of all-time, but took years for it to develop into the prestigious bowl it now has become.

Before sealing a direct affiliation with the Cotton Bowl actually struggled to turn a profit. The game itself was tied in with Texas' annual state fair at the Texas State Fair Grounds. In its first year, 17,000 fans were in attendance to watch TCU beat Marquette 16-6. J. Curtis Sanford, a man who was paying for the bowl out of his own pocket, lost money that first year. Sanford pressed on with his vision for the game and venue's business opportunity.

It was in 1941 that the bowl began to gain more credibility thanks to its affiliation with the powerful Southwest Conference. Texas, which has played an unmatched 22 games in the Cotton Bowl, made its first appearance in 1943.

The national championship was decided at the Cotton Bowl for the first time in 1960. Syracuse defeated Texas 23-14 with the help of a Cotton Bowl record 87-yard pass caught by Ernie Davis, the former Heisman Trophy winner

in 1961.

In 1964, the No. 1 Longhorns met No. 2 Navy led by the Heisman Trophy winning and the soon-to-be Dallas Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach. It was only the second time in history that the top two teams played in a bowl against each other.

The late 70s and 80s saw a rivalry developed between UT and the Alabama Crimson Tide led by the legendary coach Bear Bryant. The Longhorns won every meeting against the Crimson Tide, two of which were come-from-behind wins in the fourth quarter.

The bowl's prestige suffered in the late 80s and 90s with a decline in the Southwest Conference's quality of play. The SWC was poisoned by NCAA probation and bowl-ineligible teams.

After more than 70 years of the cotton bowl game being played at the Cotton Bowl stadium in Dallas, the game was moved to Dallas Cowboys Stadium (now called AT&T Stadium) in Arlington. The venue change came with a revamp to the bowl's marketing and overall brand.

The conference has long settled grudge matches between the inter-conference rivalries in the south, such as the Big 12 versus SEC. This year, the Goodyear Cotton Bowl will feature a Big 12 versus Big 10 matchup between No. 5 Baylor (Big 12) and No. 8 Michigan State (Big 10).

Last Five Cotton Bowl Champs
2014: Missouri
2013: Texas A&M
2012: Arkansas
2011: LSU
2010: Ole Miss

A Season Full of Spirit



CONSTANCE ATTON | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 32 sophomore running back Shock Linwood charges toward the endzone during Baylor's match against the Tech Tech Raiders. The Baylor Bears defeated the Raiders 48-46 on Nov. 29 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.



SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

The Baylor Line waits to rush the field before kickoff of Saturday's game against Kansas State. The line consisted of both freshman and seniors at McLane Stadium's final game of the season in recognition of Senior Night.



SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 9 freshman wide receiver KD Cannon runs toward the endzone against Northwestern State Saturday night in McLane Stadium. The Bears beat the Demons 70-6 on Sept. 6 at McLane Stadium.



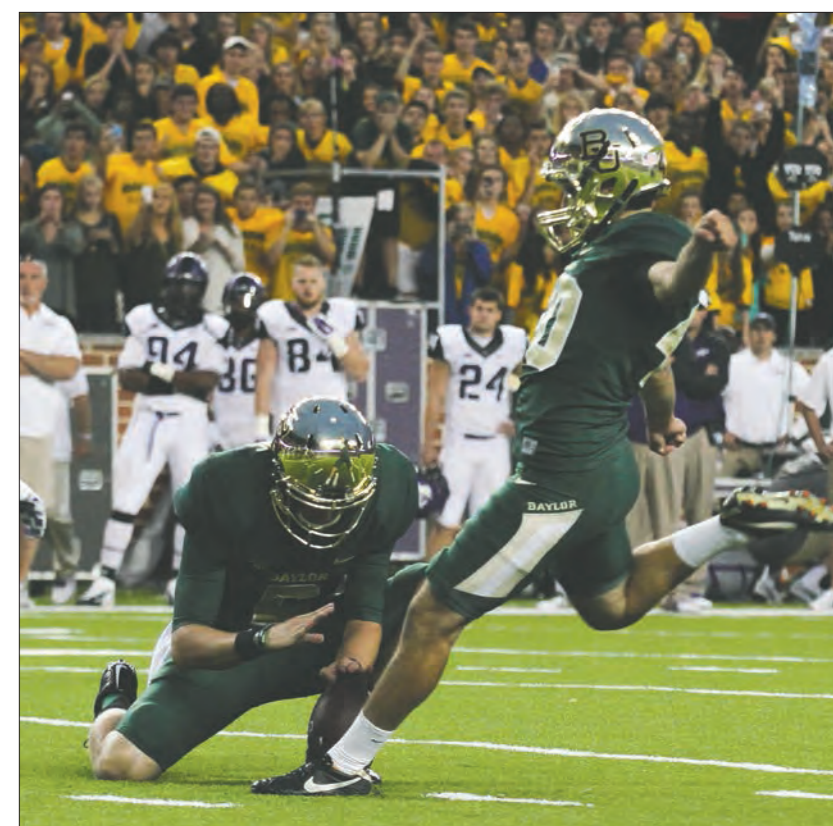
SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 13 junior safety Terrell Burt celebrates after running back for a touchdown after blocking University of Texas' punt. The Bears defeated the Longhorns 28-7 on Oct. 4 in Austin, Texas.



SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

The Baylor Line gets pumped up for Baylor's match against the Kansas Jayhawks on Nov. 1 at McLane Stadium. The Bears won 60-14.



KEVIN FREEMAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 40 freshman kicker Chris Callahan kicks a field goal in the last seconds of Baylor's match against the TCU Horned Frogs. The Bears won against TCU 61-58 on Oct. 11 at McLane Stadium.



KEVIN FREEMAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

The Baylor Line welcomes the Baylor Bears onto the field before the inaugural season opener at McLane Stadium against SMU.



KEVIN FREEMAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

Baylor and Oklahoma State line up prior to the snap. The Bears won against the Cowboys 49-28 on Nov. 22 at McLane Stadium.



CARLYE THORNTON | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR

Baylor fans celebrate a Baylor touchdown at McLane Stadium's inaugural game against SMU. The Baylor Line was full of spirit, leading the Baylor Bears to a 45-0 victory.



KEVIN FREEMAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

Baylor defense works to stop the Oklahoma Sooners from making a gain on the play. The Bears defeated the Sooners 48-14 on Nov. 8 in Norman, Okla.

Faith and football



CONSTANCE ATTON | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 42 senior wide receiver Levi Norwood kneels in prayer before kickoff during Baylor's game against Texas Tech on Nov. 29 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington.



SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 14 senior quarterback Bryce Petty makes a play during the university's Homecoming game on Nov. 1 against Kansas. Baylor won 60-14.

BU players follow cross through victories, loss

By CODY SOTO
SPORTS WRITER

When No. 6 Baylor football stepped into its brand new riverside stadium for its first season game on Aug. 31, the team had a lot to live up to. As defending Big 12 champions, the Bears were expected to do it again.

In a season full of high and low points, the Bears took the word "Christian" to heart. Team chaplain Wes Yeary has been with the team all season, and he's seen the transformation the team has made in their spiritual lives.

The Baylor football team doesn't just live out its faith on Sundays. The sports ministry team provides players with one-on-one meetings and Bible studies as well as a team chapel and prayer service before each game. These opportunities provide players with a large amount of growth, Yeary said.

"Part of [working with the team] is just being there through the relationships with the young men and being able to encourage, serve and talk with them through things they are facing, as well as helping them prepare for things that they may encounter," he said.

The mentality of Baylor's players gave them a chance to make another championship run this season, and senior quarterback Bryce Petty said it required everything they had to be successful.

"Football is the ultimate team game. You can't do it alone," Petty said. "There are 11 guys out there and everyone has to be all in, giving all they've got in their individual roles to be successful as a team."

The Bears have relied on senior leaders to not just lead them to football wins, but also to provide them with encouragement and guidance in their spiritual lives.

"Being surrounded by other Christians that are strong in their faith when you go out to play the game, you know that there's a sense of faith within your teammates," junior running back Silas Nacita said. "That brings us together. It's a constant reminder. Seeing others play for Christ makes you play for him just as hard."

Petty is a prime example of a spiritual leader for Baylor football. In his two years as a starter, Petty has shown on and off the field how he feels about his faith.

His in-game traditions, praying before every snap and pointing to the sky after every touchdown, are a part of Petty's "all in" mindset.

"Praying before each snap has given me more peace and comfort than I ever thought was possible. It helps me keep perspective," Petty said. "I play and live with God's confidence and strength, knowing that He is right there beside me every step of the way."

The 2014 season has one been another historical season for Baylor football, but it isn't unblemished. Petty was forced to sit out the second game after suffering two cracked transverse processes in his back.

Other injuries to players adjusted the lineup for head coach Art Briles in non-conference play.

However, the biggest bump on the road happened in Morgantown, W. Va., when the Bears took a 41-27 loss to West Virginia on Oct. 18. Their first loss put a thorn in the team's side, but it didn't dim the light on another Big 12 championship.

"The West Virginia game was a tough loss for us, and we could have easily been done with the season and thought we would be out of the playoff conversation, but we came together and were able to regroup and bond together," senior nickelback Collin Brence said. "It's been amazing. These guys have never given up. We have kept our faith and have grown closer through that."

With their positive mentality, the Bears didn't drop a game after West Virginia to finish out the season with an 11-1 record.

However, that still came with a price. During the team's 48-46 win over Texas Tech on Nov. 29, Petty suffered a mild concussion late in the third quarter.

He didn't let that bring his spirits down though. His faith kept his worries calm, he said.

"This is all part of the plan. There's a purpose for all this," Petty said after the Texas Tech game. "If anything, it's making me dependent on Him. You have to be dependent on God, and that's what I'm going to do."

Petty did just that. After passing his medical screenings the day before Saturday's game, Petty had one of his most impressive games against Kansas State. He had 412 yards on 34-of-40 receptions for one passing and rushing touchdown.

With Petty leading the way, Baylor hoisted the championship trophy in Waco for the second year in a row.

"I'm so proud of those guys in the locker room.

When you work so hard with each other and you've got a common goal and reach it, it's the greatest feeling in the world," Petty said. "We're just humbled. I don't know why God put me in this position to lead these guys, but God is good."

Baylor football did not have a perfect road to the Big 12 title, but it was their faith that kept them in the race for another conference championship. The four-month journey served as a great preparation tool for life itself, Yeary said.

"The real mark of a man is how he responds when he does get knocked down," Yeary said. "Learning to deal with setbacks really prepares these young men for life itself, but when we have the hope of Christ in our lives and trust that He works all things, we can keep pressing on."

The football program isn't just training them for Big 12 and national championships, but for a victory on God's team.

"I don't think any of us leave the same compared to when we got here. It's a blessing to watch players come in here and leave as men of God who have a sense of purpose and calling in their life that goes beyond the football field," Yeary said. "So many of them leave here knowing that they're in God's hands and He has a plan and purpose, and to think that we have been given the privilege to equip them for that is a real blessing."

Petty tackles adversity with spiritual insight

By CODY SOTO
SPORTS WRITER

Senior quarterback Bryce Petty watched on the sidelines and saw teammate and Heisman trophy winner Robert Griffin III go down in the team's shootout against Texas Tech on Nov. 26, 2011. Griffin had suffered a concussion and would not return to the game.

Petty could have had a chance to finally step on the field, but it was former quarterback Nick Florence who got the nod from head coach Art Briles. So Petty had to wait another year before playing.

"There were 1,786 days between my final high school start and my first start at Baylor. Those days were filled with fear and doubt about if I was ever going to get to play," Petty said.

Petty would not put his head down, though. Little did he know that two years down the road, he would be a back-to-back Big 12 conference champion for his leadership on and off the field.

In his first season as Baylor's starting quarterback, Petty had an impressive year with 250 completions for 4,200 yards and 32 touchdowns during an 11-2 record in 2013.

"If Bryce has a sock on crooked, he corrects it. Everything is perfect and he wants to be great at everything he does. That's what you've got to have there," Briles said. "You have to have a QB that's special if you're going to have a chance to have a really good football team. We've got a stud at quarterback."

The Midlothian native helped Baylor achieve its first Big 12 title, something that had never been accomplished. The 30-10 win over No. 25 Texas on Dec. 7, 2013, cemented Petty's name into Baylor history.

"I have come a long way since 2010," Petty said. "I always have something to get better at, and I can take that to heart and to the practice field each and every day. I love it. That is why I like to play."

Finishing in seventh place in the Heisman trophy race, Petty could have made the decision to enter the 2014 NFL Draft.

Instead, he returned to Waco for his final season of eligibility.

"It is only the second time in seven years that we have had a returning quarterback, so it is a huge deal," Briles said. "A lot of times they are back because of necessity, but this guy is back because he is good, and it is the best thing for him and for us."

Petty garnered numerous honors following last season's historical achievements, and he was prepared

to do it again.

However, he hit a roadblock after suffering cracked transverse processes in his back during the Bears' 2014 season opener against SMU. Petty was forced to sit out the next game against Northwestern State.

"It's certainly tested our depth without question," Briles said. "Even though we are a little depleted, we have a few more avenues we can go down to make sure everything stays the way we need it to be."

After that, things looked a bit shaky for Petty. He was 7-for-22 for 111 yards against Texas on Oct. 4, a career low for Petty. In that game, Baylor had to rely on its rushing game in order to leave Austin with a 28-7 win over the Longhorns. As the leader of the team, he took responsibility for the low scoring game.

"A lot of it is on me because I am the one holding the ball. You can say all you want about anything else, but when it boils down to it, it is on me," Petty said.

However, he used the rest of the season to redeem himself. Following that game, Petty threw 510 yards for six touchdowns against No. 9 TCU on Oct. 11. His effort helped Baylor come back from a 21-point deficit to top the Horned Frogs 61-58.

"Confidence is not a factor at all with Bryce," Briles said. "When you get into a situation where things aren't going as smoothly as they were previously, you find a way to win. Bryce did a great job of engineering touchdown drives when we needed them."

Saturday's game against No. 11 Kansas State was another notable moment for Petty. In his final game in Waco, he was 34-for-41 for 412 yards for one touchdown and a rushing score of his own. It was a great way to end his run in Waco, senior receiver Levi Norwood said.

"Winning back-to-back titles has only been done once in the history of the Big 12. He's easily one of the best Big 12 quarterbacks who's ever played," Norwood said.

Even other players can see the leadership in Petty's action, voice and poise. Kansas State defensive end Ryan Mueller saw that Saturday night.

"The way he motivates his guys and offensive line and moves the offense can be heard in his voice," Mueller said. "They followed his lead and are certainly motivated by his actions and demands. He does a fine job of getting the absolute best out of his guys."

With Petty's final game in a Baylor uniform on the horizon, he doesn't want to leave any doubt of how he plays. The selflessness and faithful motivation drives him.

"When people look back on my career here, I want them to say that I was all in," Petty said. "I want people to say that I was a passionate guy who loved people and played the game of football for God's glory."

Petty has now joined an elite group of quarterbacks that have come before him. He may have seen his highest and lowest points over the past two years, and that has led him to be a two-time Big 12 champion.

"Bryce Petty is a great leader and example. Having someone like that who is your leader to represent your program the right way is extraordinary," director of athletics Ian McCaw said. "We have been blessed with Robert Griffin III, Nick Florence and now Bryce. No one compares to the type of role model and leader that he is to the football program and the entire university."

Without Petty, winning back-to-back Big 12 titles could not have happened. The timing of his final two years on campus benefited the program, and it allowed him to make the most of his two years.

"When I think about it, if [Briles] doesn't put Nick Florence in, Nick redshirts and I don't play last year," Petty said.

"God has a plan in everything. There's a reason that I didn't play that game. I knew all along I just had to sit and wait my turn, and it worked out for the best."



SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER



SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

Some of the Baylor fan base brings its A-game in sign making for ESPN's GameDay television program Saturday morning. The program broadcast before Baylor's game against Kansas State. The Bears won 38-27.

Baylor Nation bares teeth for GameDay

By CODY SOTO
SPORTS WRITER

No. 5 Baylor football provided fans with a memorable game day experience on Saturday at McLane Stadium. ESPN's College GameDay built by Home Depot made an appearance in Waco in its final show of the regular season.

The announcement made last Sunday brought excitement to the entire Baylor community on an important week in college football. Fans were allowed to start camping out at 5 p.m. on Friday in order to get a good spot for the sports entertainment show.

"This is a huge deal, and it honestly caught me by surprise," Dallas freshman Colby Boozer said. "With all of the championship games this week and other huge games to come here, it's cool for them to come. I had a great time."

The excitement carried on into the night as a line of students wrapped around the stadium with their tents, tarps, sleeping bags and game day signs set up. College GameDay host Chris Fowler said the game has been circled on their calendars for a long time.

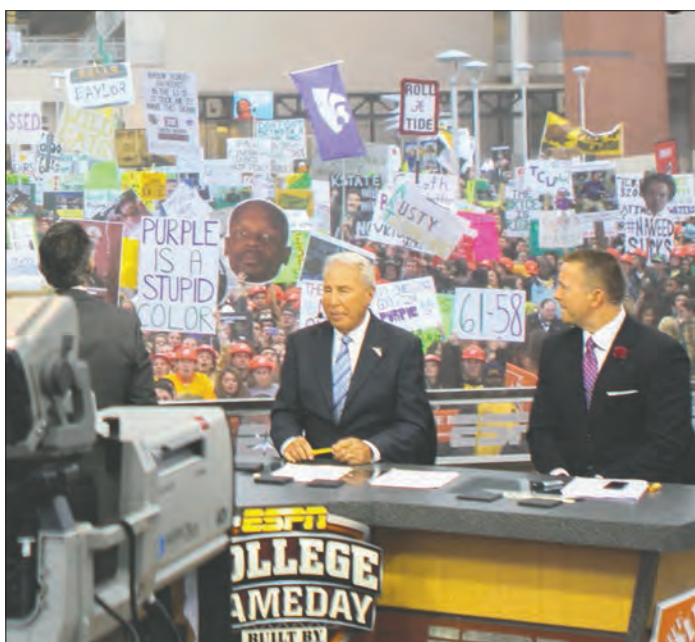
"Although we don't announce it till the week before, we have a list of games every week, and we've had this game circled knowing that it could have a whole lot of meaning on the final Saturday," Fowler said.

The atmosphere provided for a good game day atmosphere. With Baylor fans and the \$266 million stadium in the background, ESPN captured the excitement that fans have for the university's football team. Pictures don't capture the beauty of McLane Stadium.

"The stadium is beautiful. I've seen pictures, so I sort of knew what to expect, but to walk through it is a different experience," Fowler said. "If you walked somebody in here and said, 'this is where you're going to play college ball,' I think that would be a good selling point for Baylor."

Although Baylor doesn't have the biggest stadium in college football, the experience is not lost.

"You don't have to have 90,000 seats to be able to wow people and give a great game day experience with the fans. I think this place obviously



CARLYE THORNTON | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR

ESPN's College GameDay announcers prepare to broadcast before a crowd of Baylor fans Saturday morning.

does that," Fowler said.

Head coach Art Briles was able to see the amount of people that showed up for College GameDay, and that carried over to the game as well, he said.

"Our fans are unbelievable. I walked around the students last night and they were all camped out. It just humbles you," Briles said. "I love young people. And I love young people that have vision, that are innocent, that are doing things for the right reasons. That's the way our kids are here."

The atmosphere of the first game day show in Waco was second to none, Briles said.

"You can't find a better stadium in the United States of America to play a football game," Briles said. "It's a big thrill, a great privilege, and I'm very thankful to be a part of it."

Director of Athletics Ian McCaw estimates around 5,000 people woke up bright and early to participate in the early morning show, and he gives credit to everyone that made it possible.

"ESPN indicated they were thrilled and they will back," McCaw said. "Our staff did a phenomenal job. It's like running two football games in one day. College GameDay requires so much preparation and work and logistics, and our staff has been working tirelessly all week."

Alumnus and former student body president Wesley Hodges said the transformation of Baylor is much more than football. It's the foundation that has been set before this by the founders, he said.

"We are a mission-driven school, and it's all stemming from our foundation to pursue and glorify Christ. We do that by pursuing excellence on that field," Hodges said. "We have a world-class team on the field, and God is good. That's all I can say. This is a lot of things lining up, and I believe in God more than luck."

No. 5 Baylor football will prepare to play in its fifth straight bowl game in January, and College GameDay coming to town is a big indicator of what direction the program is headed.

"There's one game picked in America, and they picked ours. They chose Baylor," Briles said. "They chose Baylor because have a great stadium, we have a great name, we have a great team, and we have great alumni."

For Baylor football, students and fans across the community, Saturday was another milestone accomplished by the team. It puts Baylor on the map, McCaw said.

"Baylor University has been around 170 years or so, and there isn't many days better than this one," McCaw said. "Just to see the energy from our students, fans, the atmosphere and the great presentation of Baylor and Waco was just extraordinary and exhilarating."

Baylor offense holds own throughout 2014 season

By JEFFREY SWINDOLL
SPORTS WRITER

One of the nation's most explosive offenses faced trials and tribulations in 2014, but successfully defended its Big 12 title and lived up to the "Nation's Top Offense" title given to it by popular opinion.

Long has Baylor football been a pass-heavy, offensively oriented team. With arguably the best offense in 2013 and the reigning Big 12 Player of the Year leading their team, the Bears had much in front of them in 2014. A lot was going for them already with the sheer amount of skill and experience on their roster, but the depth of the Bears' offense was challenged from game one and on.

"It's apples and oranges," head coach Art Briles said. "It's night and day between what we were then and what we are now with depth on our football team. It took us about four years to build up to Big 12 quality depth and now I certainly feel like through recruiting and everything that's gone on with us over the last two or three years that we certainly have people that we can put on the field and perform at the level it takes for us to win on Saturdays."

With senior receivers Antwan Goodley, Levi Norwood and Clay Fuller nursing injuries, Baylor's non-conference matchups felt like

showcases for its young talents at wide receiver. Freshmen receivers KD Cannon and Davion Hall wasted no time in showing the Baylor Nation that the Bears' tradition of exceptional wide receivers is here to stay for the next three years.

Having an offense so predicated on the deep-ball and spreading the field, the Bears played to their established identity of pass-happy offense. Baylor led the nation in points per game and finished second in the Big 12 (5th nationally) in total passing yards per game (346.2). Additionally, the Bears finished second in Big 12 in pass offense with 346.2 yards per game. Baylor finished second in pass efficiency (157.0) and second in turnover margin (1.00).

"The thing I like about our football team, the thing you always try to preach is consistency. It's hard to stay consistent over a four-month period of time with a lot of distractions and I think our guys have done that for the most part. I'm pleased with their attitude, their mentality, their focus and their vision."

Senior quarterback Bryce Petty threw for 3305 yards. Petty had his fair share struggles in 2014, but he was able to do what only one other quarterback (Jameis Winston) was able to accomplish -- winning their respective conference two years in-a-row). Petty had to find differ-

ent ways to win this season. Teams knew what to expect from him after his breakout 2013 season, but he still managed to be lethal with his long ball accuracy and responsible with his decisions.

Petty was sidelined due to a back injury that saw him sit out three quarters against the Mustangs and the entire game against Northwestern State. Petty also left the Texas Tech game in the third quarter with mild concussion symptoms. Perhaps he and the Baylor offense as a whole could have totalled even higher numbers had he been healthy all season. The Bears also finished second in the conference in rushing offense.

Unlike when other college teams lose their starting quarterback, Petty's absence was no reason for panic. Sophomore quarterback Seth Russell showed plenty of promise in the few moments he had in games as the starting quarterback. Russell earned Big 12 Offensive Player of the Week honors after his game against Northwestern State and nearly broke Baylor passing records in that game as well. Baylor's near future at the quarterback position is quite comfortable as well.

"I think that's what separates the good teams from the great teams," Petty said. "Things happen in games and you've got to be able to step up. You can't have the mental-

BAYLOR OFFENSE

National Rankings

1st Total Scoring

1st Total Offense

5th Passing Offense

21st Rushing Offense

SKYE DUNCAN | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

ity that you're a backup and you're not going to play. So we don't have backups or second strings here. Everybody is a starter. It just depends on when you get your call. I think everyone has done a great job up to this point of stepping in when their number is called. We have to continue to do that because you have to have depth to make championship runs."

At just about every position, Baylor's offense dealt with injuries. No injury on Baylor's starting offensive line was the loss of senior tackle

Troy Baker. Baker and junior guard Desmine Hilliard suffered season-ending injuries in the same game, halfway through the Bears' season. An entirely new right side to Baylor's offense was introduced in the final half of the regular season, and they answered their mission bell, junior offensive tackle Spencer Drango said. Their efforts secured the second best rushing offense in the conference (235.2 yards per game).

"It feels great with people coming in there and being able to rotate

in without having to worry about who is in there, knowing that we are still going to be able to run the ball," Drango said. "It has been very nice to have because depth is always great and the guys have really stepped up."

No other team was in the top two of both passing and rushing offense like Baylor this season. This fact demonstrates the balance of Baylor's offense, and to have done so with players coming in and out of the lineup is an even greater demonstration of the team's depth.

Congratulations

Baylor Bears, Coach Briles & Staff on an Incredible Season!

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