



## How Title IX evolved after 2016 scandals

**MACKENZIE GRIZZARD**  
Staff Writer

Nine years ago, Baylor's Title IX office was centered in a nationwide scandal.

In 2016, the university was accused of not providing adequate responses to several reports of sexual misconduct by members of the football team. After an extensive investigation by outside counsel, then-Baylor President Ken Starr, Title IX Coordinator Patty Crawford and Football Head Coach Art Briles either resigned or were removed from their positions.

Some have wondered if that chapter in Baylor history still looms over the university. However, Lori Fogleman, assistant vice president of media and public relations, said the Baylor of today is not the Baylor of 2016.

"We have made great strides in training and education for all students, faculty and staff to improve awareness and prevention of sexual and interpersonal violence and to respond appropriately when such events do occur," Fogleman said. "Our leadership, our Board and our campus community remain continuously committed to fulfilling our Christian mission as a caring community."

Dr. Laura Johnson, associate vice president for equity and Title IX coordinator, came to Baylor in 2018, just two years after the scandals. She said Title IX policies on campus change regularly, so it's important that the office anticipates what effect federal mandates might have on campus.

"We've seen a lot of versions of the policy," Johnson said. "It's gone through several

evolutions kind of based on the political party in charge of office at the time and what their priorities are."

Federal Title IX regulations come directly from the U.S. Department of Education and apply to all institutes of higher education that receive any form of federal funding. Despite Baylor being a private institution, the university still adheres to several federal guidelines and policies.

"Baylor is not the same university as it was nearly a decade ago when the university took several unprecedented actions, including leadership changes and the broad implementation of new policies, processes and procedures regarding its response to incidents of sexual and interpersonal violence within the campus community,

**TITLE IX >> A8**



Photo courtesy of Mason Gregory

**I'M JUST A BILL** Plainview junior and student senator Mason Gregory (far left) was one of the authors of the RISE Act. Dallas senior KC Carmichael (bottom right) and other cultural org members attended the bill's passage on March 6.

## New StuGov bill funds cultural student orgs

**JOSH SIATKOWSKI**  
Staff Writer

For cultural organizations on campus, funding can be a challenge. But with the recent passage of Baylor Student Government's RISE Act, buying dozens of dinners or T-shirts for 40 will become a whole lot easier.

RISE, which stands for Reflecting Cultural Diversity, Inspiring Leadership Growth, Strengthening Community Relations and Ensuring Lasting Impact, passed on March 6 in the student senate, with 32 of 35 senators voting in favor. It ensures 2.5% of the roughly \$500,000 Student Government Allocation Fund — about \$12,000 — is dedicated to helping sponsor cultural organizations.

While SGAF helps sponsor numerous events on campus each year, its requirements limit smaller organizations from receiving support. Most notably, SGAF funding requires that an event have over 50 people in attendance. For small cultural organizations, this is far more than the club's total membership. RISE funding omits the attendance restriction.

Plainview junior Mason Gregory, the senator who authored the RISE Act, said that the biggest impact of the act is that cultural organizations can now get sponsorships for more operational costs, like providing food at meetings or

making merchandise.

"This bill ensures that multicultural organizations have the resources they need to thrive, not just survive," Gregory said.

But without easier access to funding, these organizations cannot thrive, and as an officer in the International Student Association, Gregory saw this firsthand.

"As PR chair of the International Student Association, I quickly saw the funding challenges cultural organizations faced," Gregory said. "After speaking with leaders from multicultural organizations and the department of Multicultural Affairs, a common issue became clear: these groups lacked sustainable funding for their essential operations. That's what inspired this bill."

As it takes effect in fall 2025, other cultural organizations have also expressed excitement at the prospect of easier funding.

Dallas senior KC Carmichael is the internal vice president of Baylor's Filipino Student Association and an intern for the Coalition of Asian Students in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. In her experience with FSA and the 17 clubs she helps advise, Carmichael has also seen organizations

**STUGOV BILL >> A8**

## Student, veteran insight meet at 31st annual poetry festival

**ELLIOTT NACE**  
Staff Writer

The annual Beall Poetry Festival will feature lectures and discussions from poets Victoria Chang, Carl Phillips and Christian Wiman, student-made exhibits across a wider swath of campus and an award ceremony commemorating the winners of a student literary contest in both poetry and fiction.

The festival will take place March 19-21 at Carroll Science Hall and the Armstrong Browning Library.

Dr. Ginger Hanchey, senior lecturer in English and undergraduate program director for literature and creative writing, said the lectures and displays set up for the event harken back to poetry being an expression of the individual and one of the earliest human disciplines.

"When we do fun things with poetry that hopefully give delight to people across campus, our goal is to give delight and to help people feel connected," Hanchey said. "We're really thinking about the root of poetry, which is human connection."

Hanchey mentioned her students' exhibits in her "How Poetry Changes the World" course as well as the direction given by poet and Beall Poetry Festival director Dr. Chloe Honum, and how they set the stage for the event at large.

"The Beall Poetry Festival brings in the very best poets who are writing today," Hanchey said. "It is an incredible opportunity for our students to come into contact with these people who have mastered the craft, who

**POETRY FEST >> A8**

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# Bring back political cartoons

Throughout American history, we clung to these satirical images as a form of expression. After all, commentary is free speech, too

## THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Throughout pre-college education, teachers lured students toward history with an accessible and fun way to learn about the past: political cartoons. From the American Revolution and the Civil War to the Cold War and the Great Depression, there wasn't an issue a political cartoon couldn't discuss.

That is until recently. Scoop up almost any newspaper and you'd be hard-pressed to find a same-day political cartoon, a tragic move away from a staple of American history. Some publications have even done away with opinion pages in

daily print altogether.

Political cartoons have always been a bridge to express hot-button issues to all generations. They were a way to express free speech and open discussions, something most news articles can't do because they can't be understood at just a skim or a glance.

In 2019, the New York Times cut all political cartoons after publishing one that was deemed "antisemitic." By 2021, Pulitzer Prizes were no longer awarded for political cartoons, and in 2022 the Editorial Cartoons category was renamed Illustrated Reporting and Commentary.

In 2023 and the layoffs of three Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonists in a single day — including the president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists — further drove newspaper opinion pages into the ground. Less than a month earlier, World Press Cartoon, an independent composite of cartoonists, announced it couldn't organize a prize due to a lack of funding.

The McClatchy family of newspapers that fired their cartoonists said it was due to "changing reader habits" and serving information unique to the community. Tim Nickens, a retired editor at the Tampa Bay Times in Florida said there was little the cartoonists could do to prevent it.

"There's a broader



James Ellis | Cartoonist

reluctance in this political environment to make people mad," Nickens said in an Associated Press article. "By definition, a provocative editorial cartoonist is going to make somebody mad every day."

Most recently, editorial cartoonist Ann Telnaes, who worked at the Washington Post for 17 years, resigned in January. The award-winning cartoonist with more than 50,000 Instagram followers left her post after the publication killed her cartoon for the

first time.

"This is a game changer ... and dangerous for a free press," Telnaes wrote. "I doubt my decision will cause much of a stir and that it will be dismissed because I'm just a cartoonist. But I will not stop holding truth to power through my cartooning because as they say, 'Democracy dies in darkness.'"

Editorial cartoons in newspapers are as endangered as Black Rhinos, and they have been for years. But visual commentary on politics hasn't ceased; instead it has found a renaissance in memes.

The most recent example is an internet-breaking edit of Vice President JD Vance. The memes, even as they have their own intrinsic commentary on the vice president, are the kind of online outburst that five years ago could've served as inspiration for the next Pulitzer Prize-winning work on how the internet engages in politics.

While memes can function as political cartoons, they still miss the mark. Traditional political cartoons were the work of intelligent people who could mix art with commentary, while meme culture integrated the word "pwease" and a baby face filter resulting in a less subtle and meaningful critique. Think back to U.S. History when you saw the famous Gilded Age-era cartoon, The Bosses of the Senate. Behind the rows of tiny senators stand the real men in charge — the industrialists — with overflowing money bags for bodies and a door labeled "People's Entrance" bolted shut.

How did we get from there to here, where the best that memes can muster is making Vance's cheeks rosy like Santa Claus and giving him a little lollipop? It never took a genius to decipher the cartoons of yesterday. But even a dog can grasp the message of the modern political meme, and along the way we've lost the valuable

critiques once offered.

Two things are at play. For one, publications fear being labeled "fake news" and are wary of associating themselves with a party editorially (meaning on an institutional level) unlike the 19th century newspapers that specifically and openly catered to certain viewpoints, like the abolitionist Liberator or the anti-Federalist Washington National Intelligencer. This is because reader expectations have changed, in many ways for the better. Ideally, the standard of objectivity has made publications strive to present different sides of an issue much more evenly and without observable bias, and perhaps some publications feel that cartoons chip away at that.

But at the same time, lines between opinion sections and news coverage have been blurred due to decreasing media literacy and the encroachment of commentary, talking head pundits and news-entertainment on national broadcast channels. Many outlets are not living up to the standards they set out for themselves, but they can at least appear to by killing the creative expression offered by political cartoons.

Let's get back to the basics. The goal of political cartoons was never to separate people or spread misinformation, but to unite people and provide a laugh. We need that now more than ever.

“They were a way to express free speech and open discussions, something most news articles can't do because they can't be understood at just a skim or a glance.”

# The hidden genius of iconic Count Chocula

**JACKSON POSEY**  
Sports Writer



A flash of darkness. Stabbing pain. The gush, the scream, the silence. All in a day's work.

But the rat race for one Transylvanian businessman felt deeply unfulfilling. After years of literally racing his peers for rats to snatch and suckle, he gradually became disillusioned with the thrill of the chase. And night after night, as he wrestled unsuspecting passersby into alleyways and bared his teeth, the moment of hesitation grew longer.

It wasn't that he'd grown tired of adventure. The son of a famous vampire, he'd spent years traversing the world and partaking in the finest dining experiences the homo sapien bloodstream had to offer. It just never captivated him the way it had his ancestors. While his peers anxiously trudged toward the mountaintops of vampiric achievement, he longingly gazed

down at the foothills, eyeing a redemption which felt miles away.

Herein lies the fantastic allegorical achievement of the creature who later dubbed himself Count Chocula. Possessing everything he could ever want, he nevertheless chose whimsy over wealth. Happiness over hell-raising. Simple living over lavish luxury. Against all odds, he became what is called colloquially "a man of the people" amid a swamp of bipedal mosquitoes.

In other words, one vampire took on social bitterness that all vampires may discover a sweet tooth.

Christian imagery within vampire movies is nothing new. From Dracula to the were-rabbits of Wallace and Gromit, Roman Catholic imagery — and the sign of the cross in particular — is meant to hold unique power. Dracula himself is held as an Antichrist, and anti-Eucharistic, figure.

"There is a sacramental intensity which is rarely realized in book or film: vampyrism as the anti-Eucharist," Catholic supernaturalist author Eleanor Bourg Nicholson wrote in 2015. "The Eucharist is the ultimate transformative and life-giving agent (John 6:58); vampyres consume blood

to perpetuate an undead eternity. The blood on the cross was given willingly (John 15:13); vampyre victims do not submit of their own volition."

If Count Dracula represents an "elaborately developed" depiction of the Antichrist, attempting to reverse the spiritual flow of blood and the physical, who stands as his rival? Who will turn wrong things right? Who, pray tell, is the savior of the vampire world?

Enter Count Chocula.

Chocula exists to bridge the material and immortal worlds. He welcomes controversy as he shuns the limelight, preferring to hang around outcasts (including a pink Frankenstein monster and a goth zombie) rather than spend time networking with his kind. Most importantly, he reverses every anticipated stereotype.

Jewish anticipation for a Messiah (literally "anointed one") during the time of the second temple was generally centered around anticipation for a conquering king. Near the end of what is now called the B.C. calendar, a number of messianic claimants appeared, gathered followings and quickly fizzled out. None were as subversive as Jesus, a carpenter conceived out of wedlock

who consistently mirrors ancient prophecies of the Messiah as a suffering servant.

This, too, is the story of Count Chocula. Far from a cereal killer, he shuns the sinful lifestyle of his peers in favor of a better way. He embraces nonviolence, counters popular notions of morality and embraces joy in a world of darkness. He charts a sweeter path than his contemporaries could've ever imagined.

Jesus "came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). And so it is with the young Count. Rejected as happy-go-lucky, childish, overly optimistic, rabble-rousing hippies whose ideas would quickly fade, the pair have still cemented prophetic roles among their respective audiences.

The pale, spectrous Chocula could've coasted on his family's reputation. Instead, he forfeits temporal renown to dutifully embrace the role of the everyman. Jesus — a poor Nazarene woodworker and rabbi born of a virgin and the Spirit of God — "did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6). Neither did Chocula see fit to embrace equality with his father, the unrighteous Count Dracula.

It's an inverted allegory, one where two characters from completely different backgrounds step down from glory to redeem a fallen species. And somehow, 50 years after the story's inception, it's stuck.

"I could not ignore their withering glances," the late SNL comedian Norm Macdonald wrote in his memoir. "They looked at me the way real vampires look at Count Chocula."

The enduring legacy of Count Chocula as a figure despised for his prophetic message echoes that of Jesus, the last great messianic claimant who was famously hated for telling the truth. Both preach repentance, calling people to engage rightly with life and blood and the mysteries in between. Both call their followers to a sort of "good life," though Chocula's is perhaps more short-sighted than heavenly.

For author Tim Powers, the most terrifying aspect of vampire stories is the "enduringly scary" idea that they drain away not just a person's blood, but also his immortal soul. Breakfast cereal's favorite monster — a goofy-looking knockoff whose blank smile conceals limitless mysteries — offers a new, redemptive perspective.

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To submit a Lariat Letter, email Lariat-Letters@baylor.edu. Letters should be a maximum of 300 words. The letter is not guaranteed to be published.

# Baylor pulls funding from local public radio station

**DELANEY NEWHOUSE**  
Focus Editor

On Feb. 28, Baylor informed Waco public radio station KWBU that it would no longer be providing cash funding to the station, effective June 1.

KWBU station President Joe Riley said this decision came as the university and the radio station prepared budgets for the upcoming year. In previous years, Baylor provided around \$209,000 to the station, as well as in-kind services such as office space and information technology services. The university will continue to provide these services to KWBU.

"There are university-wide cuts," Riley said. "The conversation ... was that we are one of those cuts."

Despite its over \$2 billion endowment, Baylor uses only around 5%, per the Office of Investments. According to the American Council on Education, the average spending for a private university is 12% of an endowment.

Distributions from the endowment covered a little over 9% of Baylor's 2024-2025 budget of \$962.7 million, including scholarships. Baylor's overall budget is largely dependent on outside sources of revenue.

Robert Darden, professor emeritus of journalism at Baylor, said he was crushed by the announcement. He and his wife, Mary Landon Darden, were founding members of the station, working with Larry Brumley, former Baylor associate vice president for communications, to bring public radio to Waco in 1997.

"This product gives so much to the community for the little cost that it is, and it's in the great scheme of things

very cheap," Darden said. "It costs more to send the football team to an away game than it does to run this station."

Darden shared the complicated history of KWBU, which he said started as a student-run station in the 1950s. As it began to fizzle out in the 90s, an opportunity opened up with Clear Channel Communications, now known as iHeartRadio. It needed the station in order to not have the signal conflict with one of the many stations the media giant ran through town.

"So they made a swap," Darden said. "We will give you 103.3 and will pay you to take 107.1, so we can get the FCC off our backs."

Despite its links with Baylor, KWBU is not a branch of the university. Instead, Baylor is the only legal member of the nonprofit organization which holds KWBU's license, the Brazos Valley Public Broadcasting Foundation. This membership is like owning shares in a for-profit organization: Baylor representatives make up half of KWBU's governing board, while the other half is made up of community members.

As a community licensee, KWBU does not answer directly to the university, but to the public. Riley said radio, as a public service, is essential to the community.

"The idea is to get important, vital information — news and other information and cultural information and those kinds of things — to the communities all over the country so everyone has equal access, and it's not just run by commercial enterprises," he said.

Darden said often, public radio is the only means for community members to get quick, accurate information during emergencies, as



Photo courtesy of Joe Riley

**LOCAL OUTLET** Joe Riley and Carla Hervey host a segment on KWBU while station manager Brodie Bashaw watches on.

corporate broadcasting stations in small towns are often unmanned. He shared his belief that Waco residents ought to become more involved in supporting the station because they can not only benefit from radio but enjoy it as well.

"I would love to see Waco step up, including students — the students who start

listening to NPR become addicted because it's like 24/7 free podcasts because the stuff is presented in short chunks, heavily curated, heavily edited, so there's no waste," Darden said. "And you can pop on their podcast or you can just let the station run and you will come away informed and entertained and enlightened."

Riley said that while the

station has around 15,000 listeners a week, only around 700 donate. The station has been working to build up members — the term used for donors — but this change in funding has greatly increased need.

"We no longer need to gradually build our member base," Riley said. "This is much more urgent."

Darden emphasized the ease with which a large group of members could support a radio station with small donations.

"It's the cost of a latte once a month," he said.

Baylor representatives were unable to be reached for comment at the time of publication.

**Words in**

# BLOOM

**Beall Poetry Festival 2025**

March 19-21

POETRY READINGS BY:

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# Students workers promote holistic health for peers

**KRISTY VOLMERT**  
Staff Writer

Seventeen students play a special role in preserving the well-being of their busy, stressed Baylor peers.

These students work for Well-Being Initiatives, a program under the Department of Student Care and Well-Being, as peer health educators and well-being ambassadors.

Meghan Becker, director of the Department of Student Care and Well-Being, commended the students' creativity and innovative abilities.

"It's been fun to watch the students creatively come up with things that they think will be effective," she said. "They're way more innovative and effective with it than I'd ever be."

Becker said that the student workers have helped increase overall awareness on various health and well-being topics and peer-to-peer support has been a very effective measure.

The team consists of four peer health educators, 12 well-being ambassadors and graduate assistant.

Peer health educators, typically medical or health-related majors, focus on public health awareness and education.

"For peer health educators, we look for students who care about public health and awareness and education about well-being," Becker said.

Well-being ambassadors are selected based on their familiarity with specific student populations, and they participate in tabling and outreach events within their designated area.

Cypress freshman Andrew Saldana is a psychology major who works as a peer health educator. Saldana said he enjoys talking to different students about various health topics, and the job gives him unique opportunities to learn and talk about what he is passionate about.

"In college, we kind of forget to take care of ourselves," Saldana said. "Through this job, I get to learn about wellness topics, and that can be incorporated into my college life."

Saldana said that one of his goals is to inform other students about these effective strategies, helping them cultivate holistic wellness in the

midst of a chaotic college life.

In early March, Saldana led a presentation on stress management at Brooks Residential College for their weekly Open Door Night.

Cypress freshman David Mauk, who attended the event, said he thought the presentation was very practical.

"They covered useful techniques like time management and self-care, which felt especially relevant with the pressures of school," Mauk said.

According to Saldana, the peer health educators help each other out and often sign up to lead different events depending on their schedules. He said that the job provides a supportive, relaxed work environment, which is very helpful for maintaining a balanced life.

"The job itself actually reduces stress for me," he said. "It's such a chill job; everyone's so nice in the office."

He said he regularly works three times a week in the office located on the second floor of the SLC, and most of his work involves research and

media design.

According to Becker, the position was just created in the fall, so this is the first full academic year to incorporate them into the Well-Being Initiatives team.

"We learned how peer-to-peer help and connection is more effective, and that's what inspired it," Becker said.

She said that having this additional support has been effective for cultivating awareness, and that they will continue to hire well-being ambassadors for future years.

"We hire students who care about well-being for students, but about a specific population," Becker said. "It's really effective when students from that specific school work with that population."

Both positions are two-semester commitments, and well-being ambassadors must be entering at least their sophomore year to apply whereas peer health educators can start as freshmen.

Becker said the applications for these positions will open in the next few weeks and should be available on the student job board.



**HERE TO HELP** The Beauchamp Addiction Recovery Center, or BARC, is located right next to Teal and East Village Dining Hall. The students employed there are specifically chosen to assist their peers in providing them with advice on how to balance time management and self-care.

## Additional Well-Being Initiatives

### Don't Cancel that Class!

This program is a faculty resource to bring in a member from the Department of Wellness to teach their students about a wellness topic rather than cancelling class if they cannot teach their class online or in-person.

### Trainings and Assessments

The Department of Wellness offers faculty, staff and students access to Mental Health First Aid which offers free courses on how to identify, understand and respond to mental health disorders or signs of substance abuse.

### Dimensions of Wellness

Offering a series of links to various Baylor affiliated sites, you can find resources for different types of wellness such as spiritual, social, environmental, occupational, emotional, intellectual, financial and physical.

Source: Baylor Student Health & Wellness

# Why do fewer women teach in higher education?



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

**BALANCING THE SCALE** According to the TIAA Institute, only 36% of women faculty are full professors in higher education, a disparity that highlights gender gaps in higher education.

**RYAN OTTESON**  
Reporter

Women make up almost three-fourths of the teaching population in the United States. However, according to the TIAA Institute, only 36% of women faculty are full professors in higher education.

In regard to this phenomenon, Karon LeCompte, associate professor in Baylor's School of Education, gave some historical reasons for why most teachers in elementary and lower level education are women. As the population in the U.S. grew, the need for teachers also increased.

"Community leaders quickly realized that they only had to pay women about a third of what men were making," LeCompte said.

Many of the men at this time were starting to look for more profitable jobs, so there was a higher demand for teachers in common schools and the women were able to fill those spots. LeCompte said it is not a bad circumstance, but she would like to see more men entering this field to be role models for young boys.

Being a woman in higher education, LeCompte has had to learn persistence as well as a work-life

balance. She said that being a female professor is not all easy.

"It's such a small percentage of women that do make it into higher education. I think it takes perseverance," she said.

Denver junior Stella Steffen is an elementary education major and is already experiencing the need for perseverance in the education field.

"A challenging thing right now is learning what it's like to balance being a teacher and being a student and being in college, which obviously is going to be different as I become an actual teacher," Steffen said.

Watching kids find joy in succeeding is what she finds most valuable when she teaches, she said. She explained that most of her classmates are women, and her male classmates may feel out of place at times but knows that their passion for what they do makes it worth it.

LeCompte said she loves working at Baylor, but expressed her concerns about the system that promotes men more frequently than women.

"Baylor is still in a process of having to rectify that situation with their current tenure promotions, while still being nondiscriminatory to the tenure applicants in the process of doing that," she said.

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# Spring Break Softball



**SLIDING IN** Sophomore infielder Leah Cran celebrates reaching base during Baylor softball's 4-1 loss to No. 12 Texas Tech on Sunday at Gettman Stadium.



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**LITTLE THINGS** Despite the 3-0 series loss against Texas Tech this past weekend, Baylor Softball enjoys the little things during their warmups, keeping high spirits for the future.



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**MISS CARTER** Junior outfielder Brooklyn Carter celebrates catching a flyball by joking with junior shortstop Amber Toven during Sunday's 4-1 loss at Gettman Stadium.



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

Leah Cran (1)



Lillie Walker (15)

Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**STAY FOCUSED** Junior outfielder Jensen Vienne and teammates join together in a pregame prayer session.



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**BEARS ON TOP** Senior pitcher Lillie Walker gets ready to take on the series against No.12 Texas Tech.

# Custom candle business brings light to Waco

**JANAY BOYD**  
Reporter

In Waco's growing community of small businesses, Kaptive Kandles stands out — not just for its handcrafted candles, but for the unique experiences it offers. Founded by Lamejah Daniels, the business evolved from a personal hobby into an interactive venture where customers can create their own scented candles.

"I wanted to find something that I could use what I went to school for, which is medical laboratory technology, and so I came across candle making and the science behind it was interesting to me," Daniels said. "So I started making candles for just us and experimenting with that, and it just kind of evolved from there."

What started as a small-scale operation has since shifted from selling candles to offering hands-on candle-making experiences, where groups can craft their own custom scents.

On March 22, Kaptive Kandles will host "The Experience," an event where attendees can immerse themselves in the art of candle making for \$35. Open to participants ages 10 and up, the event invites the community to explore the craft in an interactive setting.

Creating high-quality candles requires precision, from temperature control to fragrance ratios. Daniels said she guides participants through every step of the process, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the right temperature and understanding the ratio of wax to fragrance, which affects the candle's strength.

She also highlights that factors like vessel size and the number of wicks play a crucial role in ensuring that each candle is carefully crafted. By considering these elements, participants can



Photo courtesy of Kaptive Kandles

**DRIPPING WITH CREATIVITY** Kaptive Kandles, a local woman-owned business, encourages creativity through the art of candle-making through periodic classes.

create candles that burn evenly and produce the desired fragrance intensity.

"It's pretty fun," Daniels said. "You get some people that are seriously into it and then you have other people that it's more entertainment for them."

Like many small business owners, Daniels has faced challenges, especially when it comes to keeping overhead costs low while trying to expand. To address this, she introduced

mobile candle-making experiences in 2022, allowing her to bring the activity directly to customers' homes.

Beyond logistics, one of the most rewarding aspects of Kaptive Kandles has been the connections Daniels has made through her workshops.

"I like to meet new people and hear some people tell a background of themselves and their history," she said. "It's normally

friend groups or family that book the private parties, and just being able to help them add memories with each other — that's the good thing about it for me."

In the past eight months, Daniels has noticed an increase in interest for candle-making experiences. She believes people are seeking new, creative ways to spend time together.

"I think people are looking for something different to do," Daniels said. "Whether it's just that they live here and want to try something different or maybe they're coming from different areas that may not have something like it and they're trying to find something to do here in Waco while they're here."

According to Cork & Candles, a blog, candle making offers a way to connect with others, express creativity and enter a state of mindfulness. Custom candles allow individuals to design unique pieces that reflect their personal style, making the experience both artistic and personal.

"I'll be in Waco the weekend [The Experience] is being held, so I think it'd be a fun thing to try out," said San Antonio resident Sanjuanita Cantu. "I love candles so the idea of making my own and choosing my own scents is really exciting."

As Women's History Month highlights the contributions of women entrepreneurs, Daniels takes pride in owning and operating Kaptive Kandles.

"It means everything," she said. "Just being able to show that a woman can accomplish things outside of the home. I have a daughter, so showing her that she has the ability to ... make her dreams a reality."

Through Kaptive Kandles, Daniels not only creates beautifully crafted candles but also provides an experience that brings people together — one scent at a time.

## Review: One Pattinson just isn't enough in 'Mickey 17'

**SHANE MEAD**  
Staff Writer

South Korean director Bong Joon Ho had us in a chokehold with "Parasite" which earned a 99% rating on Rotten Tomatoes and boasts a 4.5 rating on Letterboxd. His critiques on capitalism as well as the social and economic class system were applauded — strong enough to earn four Academy Awards as well as numerous others from various film organizations.

It's been six years since Bong's last film — plenty of time to build up anticipation for what the great director can cook up next.

Alas, "Mickey 17" is here, starring Robert Pattinson and ... Robert Pattinson?

I'll explain more. But like Bong's previous films, the social commentary is loud, while still presenting plenty of humor and an entertaining narrative despite some minor plot convenience.

That said, this most definitely doesn't live up to the hype that may have built up following "Parasite," and that's probably what most Americans are walking into theaters expecting: another edge-of-your-seat thriller starring characters of some legendary series (Robert Pattinson, "Twilight"; Mark Ruffalo, "Marvel"; Steven Yeun, "The Walking Dead").

If "Parasite" is the bar, this film hardly gets off the ground. So please, lower your expectations just a little. All-time classics hold that title for a reason, and it shouldn't be expected for directors to continuously pump them out.

This is a solid film and well-worth the watch. Though mostly positive, I fear many of the negative reviews come from those who expected another classic and left the theaters in disappointment.

\*Beware! Spoilers ahead.\*

Mickey is a man who lives in a futuristic society and is crippled with debt. It's so bad, he resorts to fleeing the globe to escape it. Unfortunately, that means taking a grueling job on a one-way voyage to a planet far, far away called Niflheim.

The job? Expendable labor.

Mickey's sole purpose is to die — over and over again. Each time he dies, a futuristic cloning printer churns out a new version of him, identical in DNA and memories.

What a gig, huh? Mickey has to endure hard labor until he dies, and then get printed out to do it all over again. One of his grueling tasks was to continuously walk around Niflheim, breathing in its toxic air until scientists were able to create a working vaccine. He had to do it a handful of times.

So you're probably starting to understand why I said this film stars Robert Pattinson and Robert Pattinson. One voyage, the seventeenth version of Mickey (Mickey 17) never makes it back to ship. Thus, Mickey 18 is printed and Mickey 17 returns shortly after to find his replacement living in his room.

This eighteenth version, however, is an aggressive jerk with a huge edge to him, acting as quite the opposite to Mickey 17 and probably more fitting for Pattinson given his past roles in films like "The Batman." The two are nonetheless



forced to coexist as the law states any clones must be executed.

All the while, the head of operations, Kenneth Marshall (played by Mark Ruffalo), is a massive tyrant. His odd phrases, lip movements and nerdy intelligence are very reminiscent of our president and his senior advisor.

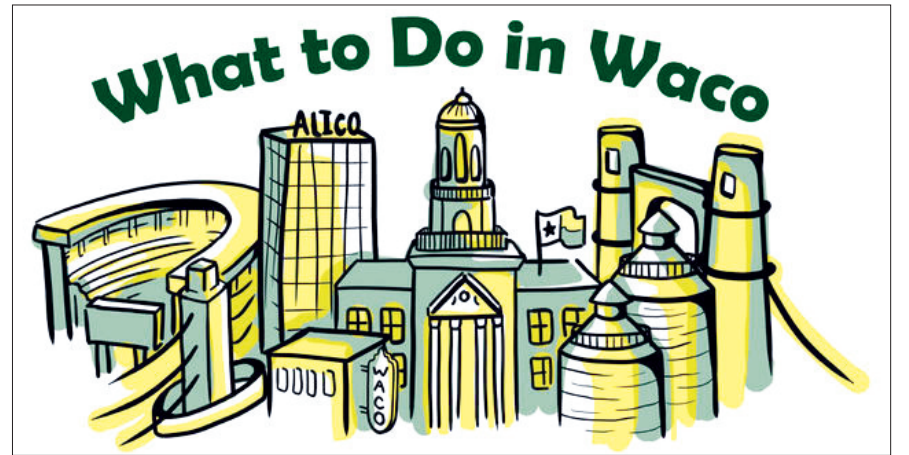
Both Kenneth and his wife, Ylfa (played by Toni Collette), are quite the quirky pair. They're one of those "she finishes his sentences but I'm not sure that's what he was going to say" type of couples. One thing they both share, however, is their motive is to colonize Niflheim, killing all of its inhabitants.

These creatures, known as "Creepers," roam the planet, and start going crazy when a baby creeper is captured and taken into the massive spaceship to be tested. They weren't hurting anybody, but thanks to a Creeper translator scientist had conveniently been working on, Mickey 17 was able to relay the message that the Creepers would get violent if the baby wasn't returned.

This began total chaos, with Kenneth and Ylfa Marshall making poor decision after poor decision, highlighting Bong's clear distaste for authority figures who head societies that treat the other, as well as their own lower class, as less than human.

Not only that, it's evident Bong is fearsome of the implications of future technology. Of all the possibilities that come with cloning, it's immediately used for expendable labor. If we're being honest, that basically follows suit with how humans have exploited each other in the labor industry for hundreds of years.

Relevant concerns are raised by Bong's strong use of satire. That, combined with the eerily beautiful cinematography work and quick, chaotic narrative had me happily entertained as I snacked on my Buncha Crunch and sipped on my overpriced lemonade.



## What to Do in Waco: March 21-27

**OLIVIA TURNER**  
Arts & Life Editor

If you weren't able to snag tickets for either of the NCAA women's basketball tournament games, no need to stay home twiddling your thumbs. There's plenty of fun to be had throughout Waco this weekend, from theatre, to drag and even a monster truck show.

**ARSENIC & OLD LACE | MARCH 21-22, 27 | 7:30 - 10 P.M. | WACO CIVIC THEATRE, 1517 LAKE AIR DRIVE | \$22-\$25 TICKETS**

Foul and funny pair better than expected in this film classic-turned-production, "Arsenic & Old Lace." Experience this black-and-white dark comedy in full color at the Waco Civic Theatre this weekend. Tickets can be purchased at the theatre's website.

**SPRING FLING CABARET | MARCH 21 | 8-10 P.M. | PERFORMING ARTS COMMUNITY CENTER, 924 AUSTIN AVE. SUITE 150 | \$10 TICKETS**

Despite the closing of one of Waco's beloved drag event venues, Cultivate 7Twelve, the show goes on! Swing by the PACC on Friday for a night of music, comedy and drag showcases hosted by Waco LGBTQ+ and MCCGSA. Just to name a few, queens like Maxine LaQueen, Jayden Daniels and Starla Moore will be hailing all the way from Austin to put on an absolutely sickening show! If you're 18 years or older, you're not going to want to miss these divas.

**HOLLY TUCKER IN CONCERT | MARCH 21 | 8:30 - 11:30 P.M. | THE BACKYARD, 511 S 8TH ST. | \$15 TICKETS**

Performances by "The Voice" contestants seems to be a theme catching on here in Waco. Headlining Friday night at The Backyard is Holly Tucker, the proclaimed Angel of Texas Country Music who performed on season four of the NBC show. Wear your boots, grab a friend and get ready to sing and dance the night away with the crowd. Attendees must be 21 years or older. Tickets can be purchased at stubwire.com.

**WACO DOWNTOWN FARMERS MARKET | MARCH 22 | 9 A.M. - 1 P.M. | 200 E BRIDGE ST.**

Take a stroll through this site where local agricultural and artisan vendors have gathered weekly since 2011.

Looking for more weekend entertainment? Scan the QR code to get the full scoop on what's happening in Waco.







Camie Jobe | Photographer

**EVOLUTION** The Title IX office has undergone a complete overhaul since 2018 and seeks to provide resources for Baylor students, faculty and staff.

## TITLE IX from A1

Fogleman said.

Despite a scandal of such magnitude, Johnson affirms that Baylor's Title IX policy is a beacon in higher education.

"I know a lot of people look for Baylor's policy to come out because we know Baylor's got it right," Johnson said.

Johnson said the office has undergone a dramatic shift since 2018, with the addition of a new equity focus, more case coordinators, investigators and staff trainings.

"Institutional support for our office is absolutely incredible," Johnson said. "Any time students needs have changed, our campus community needs have changed, we've always had the institutional support we've needed to pivot."

Johnson highlighted the importance of specialized offices on campus and increased connection with campus partners.

"We have great partnerships with outside counsel and things like that as well that review our policy and decision to ensure that siloed thinking doesn't happen and

we're in compliance with ever-changing laws," Johnson said.

Johnson said one of the biggest challenges is the "sensitive topics" her office deals with daily.

"We're dealing with people who have some pretty intense emotional pain and a lot on the line with what they're being asked to respond to," Johnson said. "That's never going to be easy work."

Because Title IX complaints are sensitive in nature, Johnson said she and her office do their best to "de-stigmatize" the reporting process.

"That's helping people understand when they come, they can share as much or as little information they want," Johnson said. "We're going to try to leave the reins in their hands and let them control what the next steps are and things like that."

Johnson said she considers Baylor's Title IX Office to be "well-situated" for future policies and student needs.

"We have some really, really talented people here," Johnson said. "We're able to meet the needs of our campus community."

## STUGOV BILL from A1

struggle with funding, and it's not just for major events, either. Even the costs of buying food or merchandise can be overwhelming for small clubs, Carmichael said.

"[This act] is a significant step toward fostering a more supportive environment for them, even if it's just helping us to lessen the burden of minor financial stuff, like getting donuts for a meeting," Carmichael said.

But even beyond the effects of this funding,

Gregory said that the bill's lasting impact will be its role in creating a more culturally inclusive campus.

"RISE isn't just about funding — it's about empowerment," Gregory said. "By ensuring multicultural organizations have the resources they need, we're investing in a more inclusive, connected and vibrant Baylor. This bill is a testament to what can happen when students come together to create real, lasting change."

## POETRY FEST from A1

are doing really innovative new things with words and art."

Waco senior Jacquelyn Franz, a student contributing to the festival, explained how the "Poetry Pharmacy" exhibit she worked on encloses poems, which resemble cough drops, in small glass bottles.

"Each [cough drop] is coordinated to an emotion that you're feeling that day," Franz said. "So if you come to our table and you're feeling sad or anxious or tired, you can get a poem that kind of corresponds to that feeling. It's supposed to help you lighten up your day a little bit."

According to Franz, the festival's blend of veteran insight from established poets and student input acts as an example for the university, showing that poetry is a sharing of experiences between youthful and veteran thinkers alike.

"Poetry is something that doesn't have to be formal or something that doesn't have to be academic in a classroom, and it doesn't have to be in a strict form," Franz said.

Hanchey said that she looks forward to hearing about the poets' attitudes toward composition. She expressed admiration for the poets' prose, particularly Phillips' analysis of the impact of lifestyle on poetry and the struggles of faith expressed in Wiman's essay collection "My Bright Abyss."

"I love getting to hear [the poets] talk about their lives and how poetry is interwoven in their lives," Hanchey said. "It's not something separate, it's something that's part of their identity and how they understand the world that we all live in — that they're using poetry to sort of understand these things that are happening to them."

Franz anticipates the lectures on March 20 and 21 because of their focus on how to grow stronger as an artist.

"I'm really excited as a writer myself just to learn from them, to listen to their process and to listen to how they handle feedback, how they handle revision, how they handle writing poetry and interacting with the everyday," she said.



Photo courtesy of Christian Clark

**CAUTION: CONTENTS MAY BE POETIC** The English department commissioned several student projects, such as the "Poetry Cafe" and its poem-inked coffee sleeves, to run alongside the rest of the Festival.

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Brady Harris | Photographer

## Star freshman VJ Edgecombe locks in for March Madness

**JACKSON POSEY**  
Sports Writer

When Scott Drew turned down overtures from Kentucky this offseason, he reaffirmed his loyalty to a Baylor program that looks vastly different from the one he took over in 2003.

Gone are the days of battling for NIT appearances. A 2021 national championship has brought a long line of blue-chip recruits streaming in the door, transforming Baylor basketball into a program that more closely resembles Kentucky than the small private school of the early 2000s.

Next season will mark the Bears' fifth consecutive season with a five-star freshman since winning the title. Seven Baylor players have been drafted in the past four NBA drafts, including five first-round picks. But the crown jewel of the program's recruiting efforts — high-flying freshman VJ Edgecombe — is its best prospect yet.

"It's great as a coach going to practice when you can have SportsCenter Top 10 highlights," Drew said. "We've had that the last couple years in practice, and hence, we've [been] the only school to have four top 20 draft picks in the last four years."

Edgecombe, a Bimini, Bahamas native, sent shockwaves across the world during a dominant high school career. Before enrolling at Baylor, he lit up professional opponents during the Olympic Qualifying Tournament, averaging 16.5 points, 5.5 rebounds, 3.8 assists and two steals in four games on 57.1/38.5/81.3 shooting splits.

"I just play basketball to be honest," Edgecombe said preseason when he was consistently being projected as a high lottery pick. "I don't give in to the hype. I just stay focused, stay humble, stay grounded. That's what helps me take distractions out."

That experience smoothed Edgecombe's transition to high-major basketball, where he immediately made a defensive impact. In just his fourth collegiate game, he notched four steals and three blocks against Tarleton State. He now averages 2.1 steals per game, tied for third-most in the Big 12.

Edgecombe's offense didn't fully ignite until conference play, but the Big 12 Freshman of the Year has been electric ever since. The nation's No. 4 recruit is averaging 16.6 points, 5.5 rebounds and 3.3 assists on 44.7/37.0/81.4 shooting splits against Big 12 opponents.

His offense hit new highs in a Jan. 22 victory over Kansas State, which saw Edgecombe drop a career-high 30 points on 8-of-13 shooting (11-of-12 from the line). The Bears beat Jerome Tang's Wildcats for the first time, 70-62, in Baylor's annual game honoring the Immortal 10.

"I'll just do anything to win," Edgecombe said after the game. "I just wanna create for my teammates ... I don't think I carry anything on my back. I have my teammates beside me the whole time, I had God with me the whole time. I just want to win, and that took scoring tonight."

Edgecombe's soaring athleticism has been critical to Baylor's rebounding efforts since starting center Josh Ojaniwuna was sidelined with a season-ending knee injury. He's boosted

his per-game rebounding average from 5.1 to 6.7 — including from 1.8 to 2.5 on the offensive glass — as his role has shifted further inside the arc.

Drew has seen plenty of future NBA players come through Waco over the years. He specifically called out Edgecombe and big man Norchad Omier as "two of the best talkers you will find" and doing "a great job leading the team" in the huddle and elsewhere.

"I'm going to try to talk [Edgecombe] into coming back, but the reality is each and every day he gets better out there," Drew said after the Bears' Big 12 Tournament loss to No. 9 Texas Tech. "He might not make every shot, but his leadership, awareness and his care for his teammates is priceless."

Edgecombe's teammates have consistently praised his personality. With tens of millions of dollars looming, the 19-year-old has managed to keep a level head — even around his roommate, fellow five-star freshman guard Robert Wright.

"He's just funny," Wright said. "Always doing the little things. He's always bringing me waters, because I'm probably a little lazy when it comes to that, bringing them upstairs. ... And then, anytime I need something or I forgot something at the gym, he'll grab it for me. He's always looking out, and that's just who he is as a person."

Back in their high school days, Wright's No. 1-ranked Montverde (Fla.) Academy knocked off Edgecombe's No. 2 Long Island (N.Y.) Lutheran team. Wright neared a double-double (11 points, 9 assists), while Edgecombe scored

a team-high 17 points as the Eagles won 90-58.

"We're roommates, so we're with each other probably all day," Wright said, who also does an extra shootaround with Edgecombe after practice. "Being around this guy and getting to play with him, I'm blessed, and I thank God for that, for allowing me to play with a special talent like him."

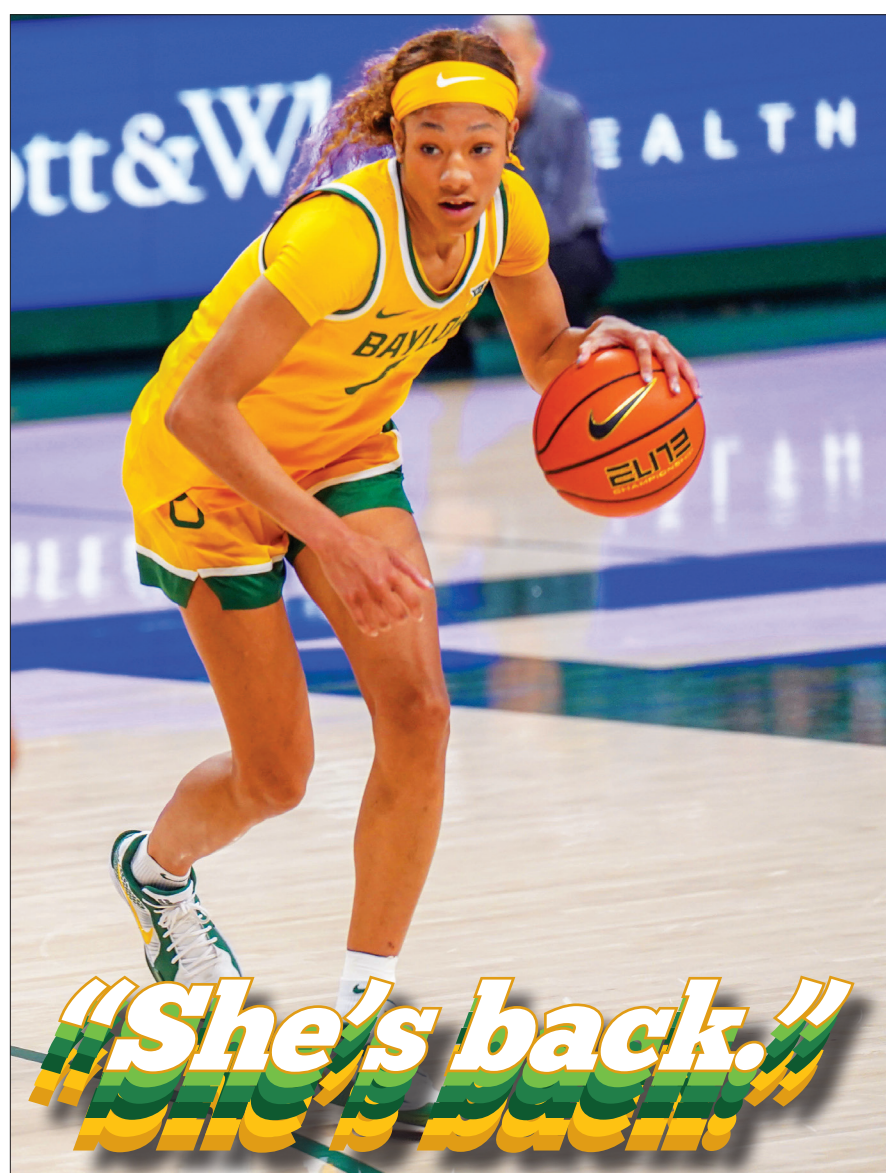
The freshmen's first foray into March Madness comes at an inopportune time. As a No. 9 seed, Baylor must first face Mississippi State (21-12) before a potential second-round showdown with star-studded No. 1 seed Duke (31-3) and projected No. 1 pick Cooper Flagg. Edgecombe says he's ready for battle.

"If we play good, like we showcased in that second half [against Texas Tech], we are going to be a hard team to beat," Edgecombe said. "I'm just ready to go to war with my brothers any day of the week."

The Athletic's latest NBA Draft Big Board slots Edgecombe in at No. 4, behind Flagg and Rutgers' freshmen duo Dylan Harper and Ace Bailey. He's a near-lock for the top five, with an outside chance to go No. 2, extending Baylor's top-20 pick streak to five straight drafts. He's likely to be the Bears' highest-ever selection, surpassing Ekpe Udoh (No. 6 in 2010) and Vinnie Johnson (No. 7 in 1979).

Before the Draft in June, he'll have his first (and likely last) dance in the NCAA Tournament. His sights couldn't be set any higher.

"We've got to go in and win," Edgecombe said. "We just focus on the next game, man. We know what it takes. Coach talked to us, so we know what's up."



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

**BUGGIN' OUT** No. 4 Baylor women's basketball announced that junior forward Darianna Littlepage-Buggs (5) would return to the court for March Madness, lighting up social media.

## Littlepage-Buggs' return sparks social media frenzy

**FOSTER NICHOLAS**  
Sports Editor

After missing over a month of action due to a right knee injury, No. 4 Baylor women's basketball was prepared to field questions regarding the status of junior forward Darianna Littlepage-Buggs heading into March Madness. But the Bears had an ace up their sleeve.

Just after 4 p.m. Friday, the Baylor women's basketball X, formerly known as Twitter, account dropped a mock press release "in response to questions regarding her return to play in the 2024-25 season."

"She's back," the post read.

That's it. Those two words on a printed piece of paper quickly garnered 30,000 views, announcing that the First-Team All-Big 12 selection would make a much-awaited return.

"Everyone loved [the post]," Littlepage-Buggs said. "That was the first thing a lot of people talked about, like, 'Oh yeah, I like the media team, it was just great.' And they did. I was just happy to put it out there again."

Littlepage-Buggs, the only player in the Big 12 to average a

double-double (14.3 PPG, 10.5 RPG), missed the final seven games of the year, including Baylor's Big 12 tournament run. With a two-week break between Big 12 play and the Round of 64, Littlepage-Buggs said she feels "amazing," but head coach Nicki Collen did note she will be on a minutes restriction early in the tournament.

"I'm just excited to come back," Littlepage-Buggs said. "I'm so excited to be back with my teammates. I think that's what I missed the most, and just basketball aside, I love my teammates so much. Not being able to travel with them for those two games kind of hurt me. I still watched, but just being back with them, I'm so happy."

In Littlepage-Buggs' absence, senior guard Yaya Felder stepped into the starting rotation, and junior guard Waiata Jennings saw boosted minutes off the bench. The Bears went 5-2 in games without Littlepage-Buggs, with two ranked wins by a combined 27 points and the only losses coming at the hands of TCU. Without their star forward, the Bears found a template for success they think will

increase the team's ceiling with her back.

"It gave people a chance to just play without her, and we showed we could win and be a great team," graduate guard Sarah Andrews said. "We had players step up, which gave them a lot of confidence when she was out. So just adding Buggs, I think that makes us an even stronger team."

When Littlepage-Buggs arrived on campus as a freshman three years ago, she told Collen her goal was to help the team host a regional. Missing the opportunity to play in the first Waco Regional since the 2021-22 season wasn't an option.

"I'm just excited to see her back out there, getting on the glass, rolling to the rim — you know, all those very Buggs-like things," Collen said. "That idea of having [fans] here and getting to share in the experience that we're going to play here [for] Foster's first-ever postseason games. It is pretty exciting."

The fourth-seeded Bears will tip off the NCAA Tournament against No. 13 Grand Canyon University at 2:30 p.m. Friday at the Foster Pavilion.



# Vonleh leads Bears with career-best season, eyes pros

**KALENA REYNOLDS**  
Sports Writer

In her first season with No. 4 Baylor women's basketball and her last in college, senior center Aaronette Vonleh stole the show leading up to March Madness. With help from head coach Nicki Colten and her teammates, Vonleh averaged a career-best 14.6 points and 5.6 rebounds per game and will declare for the WNBA Draft following the semester.

But her focus remains on winning it all in the Big Dance.

In the Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship semifinals, Vonleh scored a career-high 37 points to help No. 2 Baylor take down No. 3 Oklahoma State 84-74 in overtime. It marked the first time in her career she scored 30 or more points in a game.

"That was honestly very unexpected for me," Vonleh said. "I feel like I don't ever go into a game, and I'm like, 'Yep, I'm going to have 40 tonight.' So it was definitely surprising and rewarding to be able to have impacted the game that drastically, but I also wouldn't have been able to do it if my teammates weren't finding me when I was open and just setting me up for easy shots." While Colten acknowledged this as a rare achievement, she also noted her confidence in Vonleh's abilities.

"[Vonleh] was awesome," Colten said. "She knows I probably believe in her more than she believes in herself — 37 [points], I really don't expect that every night, I promise ... I always say it doesn't matter what we run. If she wants the ball, our guards are going to get it to her."

Vonleh credited much of her success against the Cowgirls to her teammates. However, after a 23-point loss



Mary Thurmond | Photo Editor

**LEADER** Senior center Aaronette Vonleh leads the Bears averaging 14.6 points per game.

to OSU on New Year's Day, she wasn't sure how they would adjust their game plan.

"[I] kind of didn't know what to expect, just because obviously the first time we met up with Oklahoma State, that was a surprise for us," Vonleh said. "Just the way we played

wasn't really us, and it was also way earlier in the season." While the early season loss made the victory even sweeter for Vonleh and the Bears, she also said it didn't come without significant support and a familial atmosphere between everyone affiliated with

the team.

"This is also the first team I've been on where I felt like it truly is a family dynamic," Vonleh said. "We're just so close on and off the court, and I think that just helps with our success. And our coaches — they just

pour into us every single day and just really want the best for us."

Vonleh transferred to Baylor for her senior year after spending her freshman year at the University of Arizona and her next two years at the University of Colorado.

With strong support at Baylor, the adjustment was smooth.

"I'd say this has definitely been the most seamless transfer that I've done, just in terms of my coaches and teammates welcoming me immediately," Vonleh said.

When the team granted her the nickname "Netty," she immediately felt like part of the family, allowing her to develop trust and confidence in both the coaches and her teammates while continuing to grow in her skills and gameplay.

When Colten first saw Vonleh's name hit the portal, she felt the 6-foot-3 center was the perfect fit to add height to the team and match up with 6-foot-7 TCU graduate center Sedona Prince.

"A priority in the portal was adding size," Colten said. "This is a league full of elite centers at a time when you're starting to see, all the way up to the top levels, centers run to the corners and shoot 3s. This is a league full of players that get paint touches."

While on-court success has been Vonleh's priority, she said it has also been refreshing to be in a program with such a caring atmosphere that caters to the community alongside success. Even though she was nervous about the transition, Vonleh has found a home with the Bears.

"It's just been really great to come to a program that you know is very successful but also has that extra benefit of truly caring about you as a person as well as a player," Vonleh said.

After being named to the All-Big 12 Second Team, Vonleh noted the green and gold are still chasing another ring. Following the end of the season, she will enter her name in the WNBA Draft to continue her basketball career.

# Fontleroy rides defensive success into March Madness

**KALENA REYNOLDS**  
Sports Writer

Early in No. 4 Baylor women's basketball junior forward Bella Fontleroy's career, head coach Nicki Colten quickly identified her unique defensive poise. From taking charges to blocking shots, Fontleroy set out at the beginning of the year to strengthen her defensive game and better understand opponent tendencies.

Fontleroy said associate head coach Tony Greene wanted her to be the team's primary defensive force this year due to her communication skills and natural abilities. Despite those strengths, defense was not always her focus.

"I used to hate playing defense in high school," Fontleroy said. "I did it. It was easy because I was bigger than everybody, but I didn't have to be as keen on schemes and understanding footwork and turning the right way whenever I'm trying to deny pass — all those types of things. But now I've done better."

Fontleroy set out at the beginning of the year to prioritize defensive improvement so she could guide her team and work effectively with her coaches.

"It was a point of emphasis given to me by my coaches because I knew it was something that I excelled at, and I could really help the team," Fontleroy said. "But I just had to bring my defense and my energy on that end, night after night, no matter what the challenge was, guarding one through five. It's a cool experience too because it's

something that I'm not used to.

With a focus on defense, she collected 43 steals and 38 blocks this season. Her steadfast defense quickly translated to offensive success. In February, she scored a career-high of 29 points and seven 3-pointers in a game against Cincinnati.

"Bella is strong, and she's got good feet, but it's the intelligence over time," Colten said. "It's knowing your opponents. It's knowing when to use your strength. A year ago, Bella took charges and got no blocks. This year, she went through a stretch where she was doing nothing but block shots. And we're like, 'Girly, let's not get in foul trouble, let's mix that, be in position to take them.'"

Colten said Fontleroy's uniqueness comes from her fearlessness in making plays, her ability to read opponents and her continued communication with teammates.

While Fontleroy is eager to finish the season strong and head into her senior year, she acknowledged experiencing a "junior-year slump."

"People talk about getting in a junior year slump, which I think I was in a little bit of a shooting slump at one point," Fontleroy said. "But just knowing that I've gotten myself out of that, I've communicated with my teammates well and done my job well. Hopefully, next year will be an even bigger jump in all things for me."

Even during shooting struggles, Fontleroy's defensive presence never wavered, filling the gaps of poor shooting nights with explosive defense.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

**BUCKETS** Junior forward Bella Fontleroy aims for a layup during Baylor women's basketball's loss to TCU on March 9 at Foster Pavilion.



Mary Thurmond | Photo Editor

**DEFENSE** Junior forward Bella Fontleroy has been a defensive force this season, and using this versatility, she has earned a spot on the All Big-12 Defensive Team.

**Sports**

# Baylor to host regional



Mary Thurmond | Photo Editor  
**PSYCHED SELFIE** Junior forward Bella Fontleroy (right), senior center Aaronette Vonleh (left front) and freshman guard Ines Goryanova (left back) celebrate being named a No. 4 seed during the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament Selection Show Sunday night in the Foster Pavilion.

**FOSTER NICHOLAS**  
Sports Editor

Baylor women's basketball was selected as the No. 4 seed in the Spokane Regional 1 and will host the first two rounds of the NCAA Tournament at Foster Pavilion, ESPN announced Sunday.

The Bears (27-7, 15-3 Big 12) will open the 2025 NCAA Tournament at 2:30 p.m. Friday against No. 13 seed Grand Canyon (32-2, 16-0 WAC) at Foster Pavilion. The winner will advance to a second-round matchup on Sunday against the winner of No. 5 Ole Miss (20-10, 10-6 SEC) and No. 12 Ball State (27-7, 16-2 MAC).

"Until you see it, you imagine it," head coach Nicki Colleen said. "You think the numbers say you should be in that position [to host], but it still feels good to see it come up and to know we get to go home and plant from our own beds all week."

For the second time under Colleen, Baylor will host the first and second rounds — this being the first time at the Foster Pavilion. Graduate guard Sarah Andrews is the only player on the team who has played postseason basketball at home, with the last game being a second-round exit at the hands of No. 10 South Dakota in 2022.

"It's great to be at Foster; it's a great atmosphere when we do play here, and it's an advantage playing at home," Andrews said. "We want that fan base that we had against TCU. We want everybody to come out and bring that support because they're going to be needed at a time like this."

The Bears will have junior forward Darianna Littlepage-Buggs back for the first time since Feb. 15 when they face the Antelopes in the first

round. Littlepage-Buggs dealt with a right knee injury that forced her to miss a month and take on a role as the team's "cheerleader," something she said she enjoyed.

"I was excited to be a cheerleader," Littlepage-Buggs said. "I got to travel and see my teammates from a different perspective. That was great, but I'm so excited to be back. We [want] to make it far. That's our group expectation."

The 2025 Big Dance marks the Bears' 21st straight appearance, the third-longest active NCAA Tournament streak in the nation. As a No. 5 seed in 2024, Baylor advanced to the Sweet 16 where they faced a No. 1 seed, something the green and gold are looking to replicate as a hosting team.

"We surprised a lot of people," Andrews said. "Not really having a true post last year, I think makes a huge difference. We've been in big games, especially with this team. And I think we know it's our last time playing together, so we want to make a long run."

Grand Canyon comes into Waco fresh off a Western Athletic Conference title, riding a 30-game winning streak. Its last loss came on Nov. 18 to then-No. 23 Oregon. The Antelopes beat both Big 12 schools they faced in nonconference play and had won 14 straight games by double digits before a three-point win in the WAC Championship game.

"[They're] a team that really gets it done on the defensive side of the ball," Colleen said. "So [it's] certainly going to be a game that would have to work to score."

Baylor will tip off against Grand Canyon at 2:30 p.m. at the Foster Pavilion, and broadcast on ESPNU. The Regional 1 semifinal and final will be held in Spokane, Wash., with the Final Four at Amalie Arena in Tampa, Fla.

# Jennings excels off bench

**FOSTER NICHOLAS**  
Sports Editor

Whether junior guard Waiata Jennings is sitting on the bench, standing at the scorer's table or playing tight defense, "Waiz" (sounds like 'wise') has a smile on her face.

As a junior college transfer, the Rotorua, New Zealand native ascended to fan favorite status with a grin and enthusiasm that rapidly spread across No. 4 Baylor women's basketball. Before the season began, head coach Nicki Colleen frustratingly joked about Jennings smiling no matter what was going on in the game, and after all, basketball is supposed to be fun.

But just as her infectious attitude and eagerness to learn spread, her development blossomed into a key role player amid injury trouble.

"Look, the kid is a competitor," Colleen said. "You don't know what to expect. I know she is going to play hard. I know she is going to run around, she is probably going to mess up the switch, forget who she is guarding, but she is going to play hard."

When junior forward Darianna Littlepage-Buggs suffered a right knee injury against Texas Tech on Feb. 15, Colleen turned to Jennings for more minutes. Before Littlepage-Buggs missed time, Jennings hadn't scored in a Big 12 game. Filling in for the minutes of a double-double machine, Jennings made the most of the opportunity.

"Losing a lot of players from injury, it means we all have to step up," Jennings said. "We've had to come together and not rely on certain people to do all [the work]. I think my job is just coming in, bringing energy and doing my job and being reliable at it."

Jennings was more than just reliable during Baylor's Big 12 tournament run without Littlepage-Buggs. During a semifinal clash with No. 3 Oklahoma State, she played 24 minutes and grabbed four rebounds, two steals and knocked down two game-changing 3-pointers.

She capped off the evening with a corner long ball in overtime to boost Baylor's lead to seven and sealed the 84-74 win. While senior center Aaronette Vonleh

dropped a career-high 37 points in the win, she pointed to Jennings as the one making game-altering plays.

"I'd say Waiz's three in overtime that she hit, that really was a momentum shift for us and, I think, a confidence boost for her," Vonleh said. "We both needed that."

With a smile on her face, Jennings was lethal — but it wasn't the first time in her career hitting big shots. She transferred to Baylor in the offseason after two seasons at Collin College, where she was named the 2024 WBCA Two-Year College Player of the Year and set the program record with 1,227 total points in two seasons in Plano.

"There is a fearlessness in how she plays, and I know she is never afraid to play in big moments," Colleen said. "Her threes were big. She is a confident player. She missed one three on a possession. We got the offensive rebound, threw it back out to her, and she shot it again. It wasn't like she was afraid to take a big shot. We needed them. She is fearless, you know. I'm probably the one that holds her back."

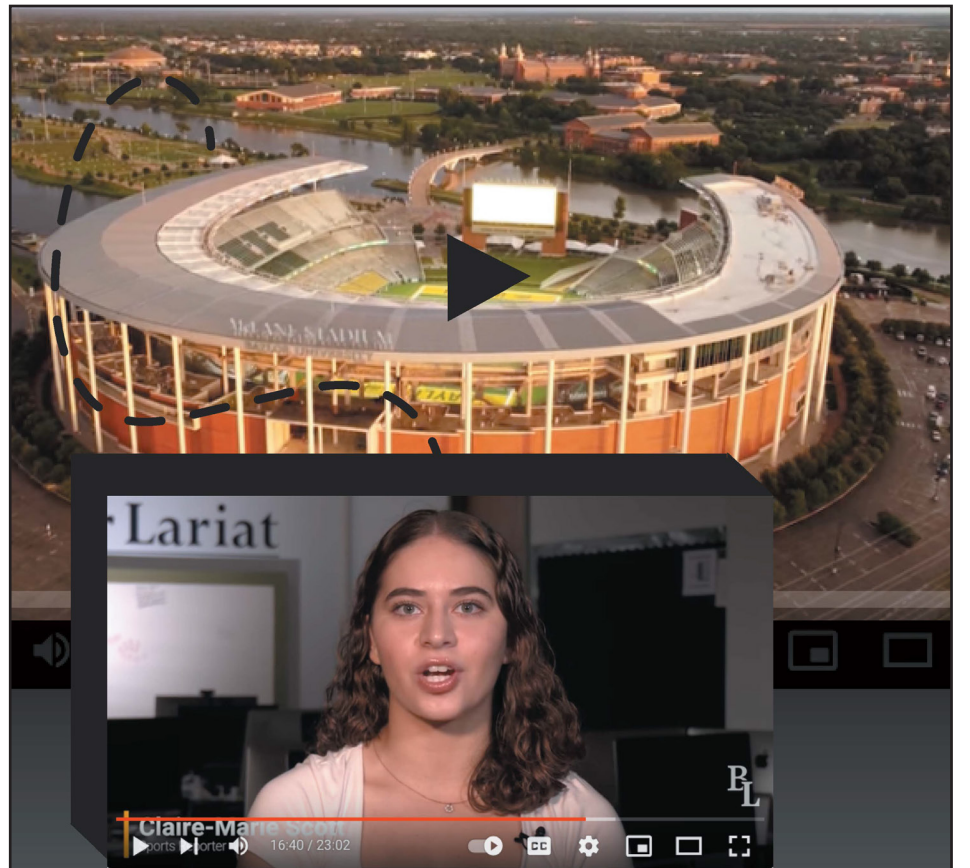
In a mostly seamless transition into increased minutes, Jennings said with a laugh, the toughest part has been remembering to inbound the ball as the 5-foot-9 guard fills in primarily at the four. But without Littlepage-Buggs, Colleen saw the fight she wanted to out of Jennings and the Bears with laser focus.

"We've been resilient," Colleen said. "Sometimes you have to understand that, ironically, less is more ... It's made Waiz a lot more invested. Not because she wasn't ever a great teammate or had a bad attitude. But you hit that point as someone who doesn't get a ton of minutes where you begin to check out, whether you want to or not. And I think the nature of being limited in numbers is that everyone has stayed pretty locked in and knows there's opportunity."

With Littlepage-Buggs prepared to rejoin the rotation for the NCAA Tournament, Jennings aims to keep bringing the energy on the bench and on the court to spark a deep postseason run.

No. 4 Baylor women's basketball will open the Big Dance against No. 13 Grand Canyon in the Round of 64 at 2:30 p.m. Friday at the Foster Pavilion.

Waiata Jennings (7)  
Mesha Mittanasala |  
Photographer

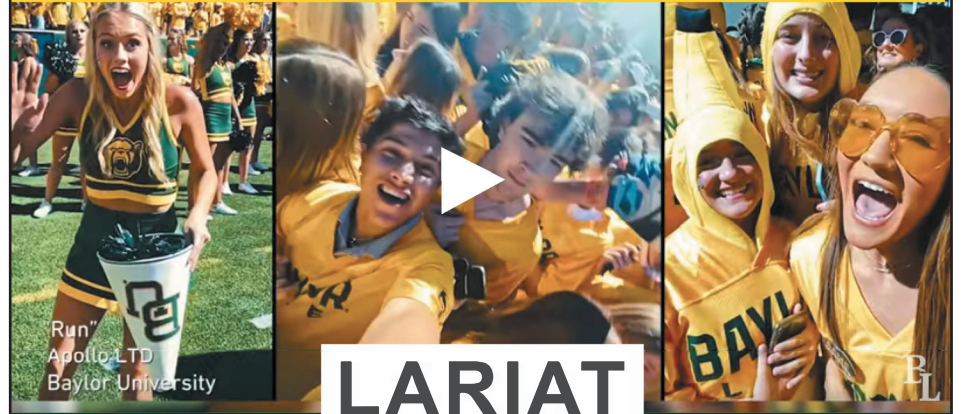


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<b>JACKSON POSEY</b> Sports Writer					
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<b>AIDAN PHAM</b> Sports Reporter					
<b>JOE PRATT</b> LTVN Executive Producer					
<b>BRADEN MURRAY</b> LTVN Sports Director					

**What double-digit seed will reach the Sweet 16?**

	<b>REGION &amp; SEED</b>	<b>CINDERELLA</b>
<b>FOSTER NICHOLAS</b> Sports Editor	WEST No. 12	
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<b>JEFFREY COHEN</b> Sports Writer	MIDWEST No. 13	
<b>KALENA REYNOLDS</b> Staff Writer	SOUTH No. 12	
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<b>AIDAN PHAM</b> Sports Reporter	SOUTH No. 12	
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**Who will pull the biggest Round of 64 upset?**

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<b>JACKSON POSEY</b> Sports Writer		
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# Final Four to the 254: Omier leads team with work ethic

**JEFFREY COHEN**  
Sports Writer

After leading Miami to the Final Four in 2023, graduate forward Norchad Omier lit up the box score in his lone season with No. 9 Baylor men's basketball, rocketing up all-time career leaderboards in college basketball.

Throughout his career, the Bluefields, Nicaragua, native has been a double-double threat night in and night out. Omier has averaged double-digit points and rebounds in all five seasons of his collegiate career, including 15.9 points and 10.9 rebounds per game this season at Baylor.

The two-time All-ACC forward announced on social media in May 2024 that he would take his talents to Waco for his final year of college basketball. In his post, Omier said he wanted to "this time help lead [his] team to a national championship" after a deep tournament run with the Hurricanes two seasons prior.

He made an immediate impact with title aspirations, posting six double-doubles before Big 12 play. But entering a conference known for its physicality was another challenge he had to face.

"You can't get comfortable at any moment," Omier said after the Bears' 74-71 home loss to TCU on Jan. 19.

"They told me about a Big 12 play, now I'm experiencing it firsthand."

Throughout his first season in the conference, Omier stood among the nation's best and most physical rebounders. He finished the regular season averaging the fifth most rebounds in the country, adding 15 double-doubles to his season total throughout Baylor's conference schedule.

"I thought [J'wan Roberts] was the toughest guy on the floor tonight. Him and Norchad Omier. That dude's a machine," Houston head coach Kelvin Sampson said following a 65-61 win over the Bears on March 8. "We're a really good rebounding team, and he almost had more offensive rebounds by himself — he's just special."

In a road win against Utah on Jan. 25, Omier became the 13th player in NCAA history to record 2,000 points and 1,500 rebounds in a career. The milestone put Omier in the company of college and professional basketball legends, notably Ralph Sampson, Elvin Hayes, Elgin Baylor and Tim Duncan.

"When you rebound, you win games, and you lose games when you don't rebound," Omier said. "When we rebound good, it's hard to beat us. No, that was big."

Along with being one of the top rebounders in the nation, Omier has been credited as a "great teammate" by his coaches and teammates. He has always stood out statistically throughout his career, but the numbers are only a product of Omier's work ethic and mindset.

"Sometimes people like Norchad come in and it's about their points and their numbers and that," head coach Scott Drew said. "When you got guys that just care about winning and playing, it's fun."

This mindset can be attributed to Omier's gratitude for playing basketball and trying not to take it for granted — being the first person from Nicaragua to play Division I hoops.

"We don't have to play basketball. We get to play basketball. And it's just a blessing," Omier said. "Grinding and getting the right outcome, it always feels so good."

Despite being 6-foot-7 and matching up against opposing centers clearing seven feet, Omier's strength on the glass has been vital to the Bears. With injuries and lack of depth plaguing Baylor, especially after junior center Josh Ojianwuna suffered a season-ending injury in February, Omier filled in at



Brady Harris | Photographer

**SLAM DUNK** Graduate forward Norchad Omier has averaged double-digit points and rebounds in all five seasons of his collegiate career.

the five.

The foundation of Omier's outlook is his faith. Like his head coach and teammates, Omier gives thanks to God every postgame press conference before he answers any of the media's questions.

"You've got to give all honor and glory to the Lord," Omier said. "We play for one

spectator, and that's God."

Omier's openly expressed faith is one of many throughout Baylor Athletics. Following Drew's Culture of J.O.Y., teams, athletes and coaches have followed suit, including Baylor baseball's player-led Bible study and redshirt junior quarterback Sawyer Robertson praying over LSU linebacker Whit

Weeks after he got injured in the Texas Bowl.

Omier, in his second NCAA Tournament appearance, looks to continue leading the Bears throughout March, beginning with their Round of 64 game against No. 8 seed Mississippi State at 11:15 a.m. Friday at the Lenovo Center in Raleigh, N.C.



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**RETURN OF THE BEARS** Redshirt junior guard Langston Love celebrates with the Bears' bench after a timeout during Baylor men's basketball's 91-76 win over UCF on Feb. 8.

## Baylor to play Mississippi State in NCAA Tournament Round of 64

**JACKSON POSEY**  
Sports Writer

For the sixth straight season, Baylor is going dancing in the NCAA Tournament. The NCAA selection committee announced Sunday that Scott Drew's Bears (19-14, 10-10) earned a No. 9 seed in the East Region, setting up a first-round matchup with No. 8 Mississippi State (21-12, 8-10) on Friday in Raleigh, N.C.

"Mississippi State [has] been ranked a lot this year, had a lot of success," Drew said. "Coach [Chris] Jans is a great coach. They're seeded higher than us for a reason."

After opening the season as a preseason top-10 team, Baylor dropped into bubble contention amid a difficult stretch of Big

12 play, including a season-ending knee injury to starting center Josh Ojianwuna. But the Bears bounced back from a three-game skid to win three of their last five, with the two losses coming to top-three seeds Houston and Texas Tech by a combined six points.

"The good thing with our team is we've been playing better basketball in the last couple weeks than we had been," Drew said. "Hopefully we're peaking at the right time."

That late-season rally proved enough to bump the Bears up from a projected No. 10 seed to a No. 9. In a particularly tough season for No. 9 seeds — blue-blood adjacent programs Louisville, Gonzaga and UConn await in the first round — Baylor

drew Mississippi State, a program with less historical success but one that still poses key matchup problems for an undersized rotation.

"Anytime you play a Coach Jans team, it's a team that plays really hard, really competes," Drew said. "It's a team that plays really hard, really competes, and you gotta beat them — they're not going to beat themselves."

The Bulldogs are one of a record-breaking 14 SEC teams in the NCAA Tournament, shattering the Big East's former record of 11. That group includes four former Big 12 teams (Texas A&M, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas) and two No. 1 seeds (Auburn, Florida).

That level of depth made sustained success difficult. The Bulldogs limped to the finish line, losing five of their final seven games by a combined 62 points, including a whopping 111-73 defeat at the hands of Alabama. They haven't beaten a team other than LSU since Feb. 18.

Still, Mississippi State's size poses a major problem for Baylor. The Bulldogs rank 31st nationally in offensive rebounding (13.0 per game) behind a rotation that features a pair of 6-foot-10 big men and two more 6-foot-7 players.

Norchad Omier, listed at 6-foot-7, is the tallest player in Baylor's primary rotation.

Sophomore guard Josh Hubbard, a 5-foot-10 firecracker, is the team's offensive engine. The Madison, Miss., native averages 18.7 points and 3.2 assists per game to only 1.2 turnovers. He and forward KeShawn Murphy (11.8 points, 7.5 rebounds) are the only double-digit scorers for a team that ranks 45th nationally in scoring offense; everybody contributes in Jans' scheme.

If Baylor knocks off Mississippi State, a second-round matchup with No. 1 Duke (and projected top NBA pick Cooper Flagg) looms. It would practically be a home game for the Blue Devils (31-3), who play just half an hour from the opening-weekend venue in Raleigh. Baylor would be a heavy underdog in that matchup unless Flagg unexpectedly misses more time due to his ankle injury.

"One negative for both the eight and nine is you have to play the one if you're blessed to win," Drew said. "In [former Duke transfer Jeremy Roach's] mind, when he saw that, I know it was bittersweet for him because he loves Duke, loves their team."

## Wright guy for the job: Freshman sets records

**AIDAN O'CONNOR**  
Sports Writer

At halftime versus then-No. 11 Kansas on Feb. 1, down 19 points and without freshman VJ Edgecombe, everything looked like Baylor men's basketball was done for. ESPN's analytics said that the Jayhawks had a 96.7% win probability.

Freshman guard Robert O. Wright III was the other 3.3%.

"We really just wanted to do whatever it takes to win," Wright said. "When he went down, we just knew we had to fight to the end."

Wright helped the Bears (19-14) storm back and steal an 81-70 victory, mounting the largest blown lead in Kansas program history. When their defeat looked certain, Wright dropped a career-high 24 points and brought Baylor to life. When the lights were the brightest, Wright thrived.

On March 4 against TCU, the Bears and the Horned Frogs were tied 58-58 with less than 30 seconds to play. Wright took control and drew a blocking foul that sent him to the free-throw line. With the team depending on him, he made both free throws, sealing a 61-58 win.

Wright came to Waco no stranger to the big moment. He played high school ball at Montverde Academy alongside projected No. 1 overall pick Cooper Flagg, going undefeated and winning the national championship in his senior season.

"We had one goal since the beginning of the season, that was to win the national championship," Wright said. "We never shortcut on each other, we all got on each other, we had disagreements — we all did everything with each other ... I think us being that close, it just made it way easier on the floor, just to trust each other in those

big moments."

At Baylor, Wright made an impact immediately, eventually working his way into the starting lineup. With injuries to Edgecombe, graduate guard Jeremy Roach and junior center Josh Ojianwuna, Wright's usage grew exponentially. He was one of only two Bears to appear in all 33 games.

"[The] thing that drives me most is just how bad I want it," Wright said. "And then I just love the game. I mean, it's all I like doing. It's my favorite thing to do at any time of the day."

Heading into the Big Dance, Wright leads the team in assists per game (4.3) and is third on the team in points per game (11.3). Wright holds the program record for assists as a freshman with 143 and counting. He also set the freshman record for most assists in a single game, dishing out 13 in a 94-69 win over Norfolk State on Dec. 11.

Wright was named to the Big 12 All-Freshman Team alongside Edgecombe, the Big 12 Freshman of the Year, and an All-Conference Honorable Mention.

"Rob's a winner, and VJ's a winner," head coach Scott Drew said. "People ask about those two freshmen in particular — they're happy if they score two points and we win, and they're happy if they score 20 if that's what it takes to win. You never doubt their intentions or their commitment to being winners. The bigger the moment, the better they play because of their desire to win for their team."

Going into March Madness, Drew and the Bears are comfortable with Wright keeping a prominent role since he has shown this season that he can be the go-to guy to lead and finish games.

"One thing about Rob, and I think VJ will attest to this because both of them are cut from the same cloth," Drew said. "When the game's on the line, don't bet against them."



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**RECORD-BREAKER** Freshman guard Robert Wright III was named to the Big 12 All-Freshman Team and an All-Conference Honorable Mention.

"The good thing with our team is we've been playing better basketball in the last couple weeks than we had been. Hopefully we're peaking at the right time.

**SCOTT DREW | HEAD COACH**

**Sports**

# Senior guards leave their mark in final year



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

**TEAMWORK** Graduate guard Sarah Andrews gives a high-five to senior guard Jada Walker during Baylor's win against Iowa State Feb. 22 at Foster Pavilion.

**JEFFREY COHEN**  
Sports Writer

Reaching the program's 21st consecutive tournament appearance, graduate guard Sarah Andrews and senior guard Jada Walker leaned on leadership and experience to put No. 4 Baylor women's basketball in a position to succeed in March.

After falling to No. 1 seed USC in the Sweet 16 last year, the Bears fought their way back to the NCAA Tournament, finishing the season as Big 12 runners-up with a 27-7 record behind a veteran backcourt and dynamic play up front.

"With this group, we got some experienced players, we picked up Netty [Aaronette Vonleh], and I think we got a chance to make a lot of noise," Andrews said. "We got a taste of the tournament last year, and I think we're gonna go a little bit deeper than what we did last year."

For the duo, the team's success is the top priority. As the leaders of a prestigious program that has now made 21 straight tournament appearances and won three national championships, they have big shoes to fill.

"Most of all, I want to take this team as far as I can," Andrews said. "I just want to be able to leave an impact with that leadership — [that] Baylor still has to be the Baylor that it was when I first came."

With the last few games of their collegiate careers ahead, Andrews and Walker understand they need to take every play and game one step at a time. Their time at Baylor means more to them now than ever.

"For the seniors, this is our last go around, so really just giving it our all because these are our last regular season games," Walker said. "This is the last time we're going to see these teams at home, in our gym or at their gym, so really just taking it personal and being intentional about it."

The guards' focus on intentionality and detail has helped elevate their play and ability to lead their team in practice and the game.

"You can see [Andrews's leadership] when we step on the court, when we're in practice — whether she's on as point guard, every rep, whether she's a two," junior guard Bella Fontleroy said. "Her voice and her leadership have a tremendous impact on us and our program."

Baylor's backcourt showcases one of the best passing duos in the country. Walker sits 23rd in the nation in assists per game (5.4),

while Andrews added an average of 5.0 assists per game — ranking 37th among all Division I players. The two senior guards lead the 9th best passing offense in the country, as the Bears are dishing out 18.5 assists per game.

"If we're in an action together, we know if I pop, she's gonna roll, like we just know how to read each other really well," Fontleroy said. "Sarah knows how to read us better than, I think, we even know what we're gonna do."

**"**I think when we have the confetti dropping down on our heads, then it'll all come together.**"**

**SARAH ANDREWS | GRADUATE GUARD**

While Andrews has been a staple of the program — holding the all-time record for games played — Walker also made a name for herself wearing the green and gold. After transferring from Kentucky in 2023, she established herself as a pass-first guard who strengthened the Baylor backcourt.

Walker has started all 68 games she has played as a Bear, including four games with 10 or more assists and eight games with eight or more assists — all coming in her senior season.

Emotions may run high for the seniors as they play their final games in Waco, but their dedication and optimism for their team remain strong. Coming into the NCAA Tournament as a No. 4 seed, they still expect to be contenders for a national championship and try to win the program's fourth.

"We don't have another year left, so I think at the beginning, it'll be bittersweet because I'm going to hate leaving, and this may be the last one in Foster," Andrews said. "But I think when we have the confetti dropping down on our heads, then it'll all come together."



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

**GAME-CHANGER** Guard Jada Walker attempts a contested layup during Baylor's win against University of Cincinnati Feb. 2 at Foster Pavilion.



Baylor Lariat Radio hosts a lively sports podcast **EVERY WEDNESDAY**, discussing high and low points of Baylor athletics, students' takes on the Big 12, NCAA and professional sports.



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