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EDITORIAL

The true meaning of homecoming

In just a few days, Baylor's 116th celebration of homecoming will commence, ringing in all the craziness and excitement that comes with it every year. Events like Pigskin Revue, the parade and the football game are long-awaited and long prepared for, with students putting in the work toward these events for months prior.

For many students and organizations involved, there's pressure to be perfect. We want to preserve the glory of homecoming and bring pride to the alumni, staff and families returning to celebrate with us.

And for those who are attendees rather than participants in the event's festivities, homecoming becomes somewhat of a geo-caching experience. The weekend becomes a scramble to see how many events one can hit in 48 hours. Students exhaust themselves, dashing from Dinner with the Livingstones to the bonfire, to the parade, to the tailgate and game, mostly for the sake of getting photos with friends and avoiding FOMO.

Now the history of our university's homecoming is a legacy in itself. For instance, Baylor was the first university to host a homecoming celebration in 1909. We think it's fair to say that homecoming is kind of Baylor's thing.

With all of Baylor's Homecoming pomp, fanfare and pride, it can become easy to get lost in the events themselves. When that's all we view homecoming as, the weekend will end and leave us pondering



James Ellis | Cartoonist

the tradition's true purpose.

Sure, the word "homecoming" literally means "the return home," according to Merriam-Webster. But what is the significance of returning home, in alumni returning to Baylor? It's certainly not just to make sure Pigskin acts now are as exceptional as they were in the '90s. Surely the reason isn't just to get a selfie with Indy and Belle. And it's certainly not to attend what some sports reporters are saying could be the final football game coached by Dave Aranda.

What brings Bears back is more than these beloved traditions; it's the reunification of students and faculty with alumni, former professors and family from near and far, bridging the past and present Baylor generations. At the heart of homecoming is a gathering of friends and family, and an opportunity to make memories with each other, right here at

Baylor — a place all of us have called "home" at some point.

Even more, this time is an opportunity to be thankful for the memories, experiences and people that our university has brought all of us, and a chance to honor the students and staff who continue to carry on Baylor's legacy today.

A recounting of the first homecoming by The Baylor Bulletin, the university's historical publication, puts it best:

"The purpose of Home-Coming was to give an opportunity for the joyful meeting of former student friends, an occasion when old classmates could again feel the warm hand-clasp of their fellows, recall old memories and associations, and catch the Baylor spirit again.

"From the enthusiastic expressions of the hundreds of visiting students the object of the

reunion was finally realized. All went back to their homes with a deeper love in their hearts for their Alma Mater."

So instead of booking yourself to the max this homecoming, all for the sake of saying you went, make your homecoming experience meaningful. Spend it with the people who mean the most to you, whether that's family, friends or colleagues. Take it as a chance to focus on the people and the purpose.

When the lights fade after Pigskin, the parade crowds thin and the last echo of the fight song drifts away, what remains isn't the confetti or the Instagram posts — it's the people beside us. Homecoming isn't truly about the spectacle; it's about the shared sense of belonging that brings us back year after year. So let this weekend be more than a checklist of traditions; instead, let it be a reminder of why we call this place home.

Why Samuel Palmer Brooks' 'Immortal Message' matters

JOSH SIATKOWSKI
Staff Writer

Slapped on the side of Brooks Residential College, the words, "To you I hand the torch," are for many, the extent of knowledge on Samuel Palmer Brooks' Immortal Message. But Homecoming is a better time than any to remember the story behind those words: they're a message of hopefulness and responsibility, even when the times around us are full of uncertainty, struggle and death.



Brooks, the president of Baylor from 1902 to 1931, is best remembered for his Immortal Message speech, which he wrote in May of 1931 to the graduating class. Even those who have never read the short address will know it by its signature line:

"To you seniors of the past, of the present, of the future I entrust the care of Baylor University. To you I hand the torch."

Now almost 100 years removed, Brooks' powerful words risk being watered down into a catchphrase. But the context behind the Immortal Message lifts it high above the realm of slogans.

Most know that Brooks himself was facing death at the time of his message. Diagnosed with cancer in 1930, he spent much of that year hospitalized and penned the speech from his sickbed.

But death loomed over much more than Brooks' bed. At the time of his message, loss was almost everywhere. Just four years before, in January of 1927, Baylor lost about half of its basketball team — the Immortal Ten — in a bus crash. And even looking ahead, the university's future seemed awfully grim.

Around the time of Brooks' death, Baylor was in severe financial distress. As was the case with many institutions during the Great Depression, the university's debt became unmanageable, and according to an article from The Baylor History Project, it peaked at over \$450,000 in 1932. When enrollment started to drop due to the faltering economy, there wasn't enough income to cover the interest payments. And the endowment, according to another article, was "practically zero" after Brooks' death, giving the university little to fall back on.

The troubles reached a point where pens, pencils, and paper clips were rationed, the first article highlights. It goes on to say that for a three-month period in 1932, faculty even went without receiving payment. But even with such struggles on the horizon, here is what Brooks had to say:

"Do not face the future with timidity nor with fear. Face it boldly, courageously, joyously. Have faith in what it holds."

With his own mortality and the uncertainty of Baylor's sustainability more salient than ever, Brooks' hope for the future means even more. It wasn't just a cliché graduation message to "go change the world." It was a rallying cry to empower Baylor to face its greatest challenge yet, a contradictory message of hope while everything around the school seemed to be crumbling.

It's easy to have faith in the future when times are good, but that's not what the Immortal Message is about. It's more than just a thread that provides continuity between generations, and it's more than a feel-good story. It was, and still is, a delivery of light in the darkest of times.

Professors like to see you home, too

DR. HUGH RILEY
Guest Contributor



Homecoming is an opportunity to connect, celebrate, create cherished memories and feel great pride in the uniqueness of their academic home. For Baylor, that's an easily accomplished task.

The more I thought about it, the more I saw similarities rather than differences among the perspectives (faculty, students, alumni) on homecoming because of the unique and shared nature of the Baylor community. Nonetheless, there are differences, which I will address in just a moment.

There is also the blending of

faith and science in an egalitarian environment that recognizes the inherent worth of every person. Our stated mission is to prepare men and women for worldwide leadership and service to help transform the world into a better place for everyone and to encourage civil discourse, which is one of four pillars in our Baylor in Deeds strategic plan.

Ultimately, I always knew that homecoming was an opportunity, but I never knew it as a blessing until COVID-19.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit colleges, there was an unexpected rush to transition from classroom courses to online formats, which many professors, including me, were not familiar with.

We instantly needed to become accustomed to terms like asynchronous, Respondus Monitor, LockDown Browser, Type 1 and Type 2 classrooms and learning to post video lectures and online exams to Canvas with test pools. Later, it meant learning to teach while engaging in social distancing, coordinating self-quarantining and the attendance policy, then teaching while everyone was wearing a mask in synchronous courses.

For students, though,

an entire generation was denied the "traditional college education," which obviously includes the homecoming experience. The impact of that experience will continue to be measured for many years to come.

I taught my first course as faculty at Baylor in 1999, so I have seen many generations of students. Every professor knows this experience well — the incoming freshmen bears little resemblance to graduating seniors because of the developmental changes that occur in those four years. In the decades that follow, when a former student returns for homecoming, the change is exponential.

During our departmental homecoming social, many of our students with professional, postgraduate plans (law, dentistry, medicine, counseling, etc.) return to their alma mater. I have interacted with former students who are now practicing in these professions, and I have enjoyed meeting their spouses and children.

These events underscore the significant responsibility of being a professor as we reflect on the transformative experience that made their professional

life possible.

Importantly, then, homecoming is a celebration — a time to gather, get to know one another, share ideas and memories and have fun.

Baylor curates a transformative experience through meaningful activities, including Homecoming Worship by Vertical Ministries; Dinner with the Livingstones; Baylor Alumni Awards, Pigskin Revue and the annual Royal & Pure Homecoming Stroll Off.

It also comprises of Singspiration, Baylor's Homecoming Worship Service, the Extravaganza Pep Rally and Bonfire, the homecoming parade and alumni tailgate, and, of course, the homecoming football game, as our Baylor Bears take on the UCF Knights.

These activities and others begin at the Mark and Paula Hurd Welcome Center, which is homecoming central for our alumni and guests, and includes performances by student groups, fun photo ops, activities for kids and many other opportunities for celebration. So let the games, activities, memories, renewed relationships and the fun begin — and Sic 'em Bears.

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A tale of two Baylors



Photo courtesy of Baylor University Archives

EVOLUTION In the 1960’s, Family Weekend had several events that aren’t featured today, including a barbecue picnic in front of Pat Neff.

University’s biggest changes in last half-century

JOSH SIATKOWSKI
Staff Writer

Depending on when they graduated, Baylor alumni will give you a different profile of their time in Waco. From year to year, those differences might be as small as a better football record or a few new faculty, but when you compare Baylor of the 1970s to the campus we call home today, the two schools are vastly different.

From student culture to campus amenities to affordability, almost everything about Baylor in the last 50 years has evolved. So if you’re walking around campus for the first time in a while and wondering to yourself, “How did we get here?”, these are a few factors that might help you answer that.

ATHLETIC ASCENSION

When Dr. Allen Seward, a member of Baylor’s class of 1975, began as a student, Baylor’s football team was a weak spot. They hadn’t won a Southwestern Conference Championship in 47 years, and without a change, it didn’t seem like the curse would be broken anytime soon.

“There was a list of the 10 Worst College Football Teams in America, and Baylor and Brown would rotate as who was No. 1 on that list,” Seward said.

But in 1972, when Coach Grant Teaff began his 20-year career at Baylor, things started to turn around. The team won its first conference championship in 1974. Just two years before, Seward and his friends were sitting in the empty bleachers of Floyd Casey Stadium doing calculus homework while the Bears took a beating.

“It changed the perception of Baylor,” said Seward, the director emeritus of Baylor Business Fellows with an over 40-year career on campus. “It also changed who was willing to come to college.”

The same redeeming, perception-altering story can be seen in Scott Drew’s turnaround of Baylor basketball in 2003, Seward said. Taking command after one of the worst scandals in sports history, Drew responded with over 20 tournament wins and a national championship.

These athletic ascensions directly caused some of the nationalization and diversification of Baylor’s student body. Westfield, N.J., sophomore Lily Norton, who was raised in the northeast, would not have found her school without it.

“I knew about [Baylor] from March Madness and through football,” she said.

FROM TEACHING TO RESEARCH

Outside of sports, one of

the largest underlying factors driving Baylor’s national ascension was research. When Seward began at Baylor, most faculty were trained for teaching, not publication. However, when a new Business School dean arrived, that changed.

“In 1978, Richard Scott became dean of the school of business, and in the first faculty meeting that he had, he said, ‘We need to have an increased focus on research,’ which meant we actually had none,” Seward said. “Not that there wasn’t any research, it just wasn’t a focus.”

Scott began by asking faculty to consider publishing in more public-facing outlets, like newspapers and magazines. But over time, new faculty were brought in to publish in academic journals, and existing faculty learned the trade of publication. By 1998, Baylor Business was responsible for over 50% of academic publications while making up only 20% of faculty. That disparity prompted a shift in the 21st century in which the entire university adopted research.

As Baylor athletics made the national spotlight, Baylor’s research faculty brought the academic reputation to the spotlight as well. The combined forces were enough to incentivize real growth on campus.

FINANCING A “COUNTRY CLUB CAMPUS”

Baylor’s historic relationship with debt was tumultuous. After facing financial strain during the Great Depression, President Pat Neff eliminated all of the university’s debt to avoid future distress. A shared aversion united the decades that followed in their pursuit of leverage, Seward said. While it kept the university safe from financial distress, it also limited the rate at which the university could grow.

“When I came as a student in 1971, there had been a plan from the Board of Trustees of Baylor back in the 1950s saying that the next building we need to build is a science building,” Seward said. “So 20 years later, they were still saying the next building needed was a science building. They just couldn’t get the funding together for this expensive building.”

By the 1990s, Baylor’s asset base had grown, and the economy was strong. Under new president Robert Sloan, the university made the decision to incur debt to build the Baylor Sciences Building, which was completed in 2004. Following the project, other major builds went up, such as McLane Stadium and Foster Campus for Business and Innovation, both

of which were financed by a combination of gifts and loans. Through the decision to borrow money and accelerate campus growth, Baylor’s identity has shifted in more ways than one.

“[The construction of the BSB] was a dramatic change just to the physical campus,” Seward said. “It also became easier to recruit good science faculty members.”

Alongside stronger faculty growing Baylor’s brand, the buildings continue to attract students with their magnitude. On Norton’s visit to campus, the beauty was enough to warrant an application.

“It’s so green, and the buildings are very impressive, so that immediately caught my attention when I came to visit,” she said.

As helpful as the renovations have been for the growth of Baylor’s student and faculty populations, the campus upgrades have completely altered the Baylor experience. The more residential, homey feel to Baylor’s smaller campus has been replaced, Seward said.

“You almost feel like you’ve gone to a country club,” Seward said. “That environment did not exist when I was a student.”

But the environment Seward alludes to is not just physical — it’s cultural.

SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS

Baylor’s growth didn’t just come from financial gifts and strategic borrowing. As the school gained in reputation and the higher education market exploded, Baylor charged much more. And as the sticker price soared, it led to a fundamental shift in who attended Baylor.

When Seward started at Baylor, classes were \$35 per semester hour. Excluding living expenses, Seward’s total tuition and fees came to about \$800. While more than a drop in the bucket, the price was manageable enough for him to handle mostly himself.

“Just working a minimum wage job full-time for 12 weeks in the summer would actually cover a full semester cost of going to Baylor,” Seward said.

So during his time at Baylor, Seward worked washing dishes, as a funeral home attendant, as a hospital maid and a number of other odd jobs. But today, paying for Baylor takes more than just willingness to work summers — it takes a benefactor.

Like most students today, Norton’s parents — both lawyers in New York — pay for her education. It’s a telling sign that, compared to 50 years ago, Baylor students are of an “unquestionably higher socioeconomic status,” as Seward put it.

But economic status isn’t the

only demographic trend. There’s also the fact that the student body is far larger, more national, and while still Christian, less Baptist.

In 1971, when Baylor was roughly 6,000 students strong, the school was heavily weighted toward Baptists and Texans. Seward said that around 90% of students checked the Baptist box on their applications (perhaps to improve chances at admission, he said), and well over 75% of students were from Texas. An eighth of students planned to work in ministry.

Nowadays, those numbers have moved. Of the now over 15,000 undergraduates, the Office of Institutional Research reports that 64% are from Texas and only 18% are Baptist — though the vast majority are still Christian.

While not exactly “demographic,” one of the biggest shifts affecting Baylor’s culture today is the debate around pre-professionalism. Perhaps a way to justify the high cost of attendance is the idea that students and faculty alike should see college as a step toward a career. During Seward’s time, the concept was foreign.

“When I was a student, people didn’t even talk or think about entering the job market until your senior year, and maybe not until spring of your senior year,” Seward said. “I think people from the ‘70s might be more inclined to a view that says less pre-professionalism and more about how to think.”

But for Norton, career readiness is at the center of it all. “I definitely consider how a class affects my career ... I don’t take enjoyment into consideration,” Norton said. “I know in my future, I don’t want to be reliant on anyone else or not be in control of my own life. So I feel like I need to put my head down and do the work now, and it will pay off later.”

PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE, BAYLOR IS BAYLOR

With more research and athletics funding, an increased focus on national image and monumental physical and cultural shifts to campus, it’s undeniable that the Baylor of today is vastly different from the Baylor of 20, 30 or 50 years ago. But as dynamic as Baylor’s history has been, Seward said the essence of Baylor is still strong.

“I think people are fundamentally people, and I think they would get along just fine,” Seward said. “Baylor students as a whole have generally been pretty agreeable and they tend to get along with each other. They respect people. They’re welcoming.”



Roundup file photo

HISTORY IN THE MAKING Delta Alpha Pi shows off their chessboard parade float in downtown Waco in the 1954 parade.



Roundup file photo

MUSIC TO MY EARS Kappa Omega Tau debuted a New Orleans-style float at the 1968, winning the competition with their jazzy routine.



Roundup file photo

FLOAT FANATICS Floats park on campus and stay for the day so visitors can get an up-close look at the details.

Behind the scenes of Homecoming floats



Roundup file photo

PARADES AND PIKES Pi Kappa Alpha’s escorts their parade float in 1980 at the homecoming parade.

MARISA YOUNG
Staff Writer

While Baylor’s Homecoming Parade promotes a vibrant sense of community, it also stirs fierce competition among Greek organizations.

The floats that glide effortlessly down 5th Street are a result of almost a year of intricate planning and preparation, according to Grand Prairie senior and Tau Kappa Epsilon Float Chair Luke Cortez.

“I was working on it probably since January, looking up themes and designs and drawing up rough drafts of what we thought would be a good float idea,” Cortez said. “And then in February, TKE had our pair confirmed, and that’s when we really got to jump in.”

In the spirit of collaboration, many Greek organizations pair up to build a shared float. Cortez said he sees much benefit in this choice, as it ultimately brings more skills to the table as well as hands to the float site.

“One of the big pros of collaborating is the design process,” Cortez said. “Our pair has done float for a long time. TKE didn’t do float last year, so we’re coming in fresh.”

St. Louis junior Patrick Meehan said his initial step as the Kappa Sigma Float Chair was to brainstorm ideas with Kappa Sigma’s sorority pair.

“In the beginning, with all of us working together, we each pitched our own idea for a float, so we probably had around 10 or 12 ideas,” Meehan said. “From there, we developed them out and then narrowed it down to our final three designs, and then we all voted on which one we wanted to do, and then we fully completed that design.”

The finalized design must be submitted to the Chamber of Commerce for theme and risk management approval, according to the Baylor Homecoming Parade Handbook. Once it gets approved, the float’s construction commences at a secret location.

Hundreds of hours of work go into each float, according to Cortez. Members spend their shifts building and sanding down structures, painting details or pomping: filling in the holes of chicken wire with squares of colored tissue paper to create designs of mass scale.

Cortez said his team organizes members to play to their strengths when constructing the float.

“Some of our guys are a lot more gifted with building, some of them are more gifted with some arts and creativity, so it just depends what their fortes are and what they like to do,” Cortez said.

Houston junior Reagan Yarborough said her sorority, Tri Delta, has a task-oriented approach to accomplishing their float.

“Tri Delt has the float chair and the float committee, and then the rest of the chapter is the task force,” Yarborough said. “The chair and committee are there all the time ... and the task force members are called in to

pomp one square or more if we can each week.”

Win or lose, each organization’s float represents hours of hard work, creativity and collaboration on the part of Greek life members. As they carve their annual path around campus on homecoming, those who have put in the work expressed pride over their creations.

Yarborough said she fell in love with float when she saw Tri Delta’s float in the parade her freshman year.

“I’m excited; I love doing float,” Yarborough said. “Knowing that you’re representing something fills you with pride because your whole team has worked on it.”

Likewise, Saturday morning will bring a mix of nerves and excitement for Meehan, but he said he anticipates showing off the hard work.

“We’ve been working on our float really hard, and so getting to show it off in front of the whole school will be really fun to do,” Meehan said.

HOMECOMING SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

THURSDAY, OCT. 30

6 - 8 p.m. Baylor Alumni Awards

7 - 9 p.m. Pigskin Revue

10 - 11:30 p.m. Ten at Ten: A Mass Meeting Experience

FRIDAY, OCT. 31

8 a.m. - 9 p.m. Homecoming at the Hurd

9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Armstrong Browning Library and Museum

Homecoming Reception

2:30 - 4:30 p.m. Homecoming Open House

3:30 - 4:30 p.m. Lariat 125th Anniversary Alumni Panel Discussion

6 - 10:30 p.m. Extravaganza, Pep Rally and Bonfire

6:30 - 8:30 p.m. Pigskin Revue

10:30 - 11:59 p.m. Pigskin Revue

SATURDAY, NOV. 1

7 - 11 a.m. Homecoming at the Hurd

7 - 9:30 a.m. Homecoming Parade

11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Football vs. USC — Baylor Homecoming

2:30 - 6 p.m. Homecoming at the Hurd

7 - 9 p.m. Pigskin Revue

From Baylor Line to legacy, lifetime memories

JULIANA VASQUEZ
Staff Writer

Generation after generation, Baylor students continue to return to the campus their parents called home. For these families, homecoming is more than just a campus tradition; it is a celebration of a legacy.

The Gorham family can trace their Baylor lineage back to the 1800s. Jim Gorham, a fourth-generation Baylor student and member of the Class of 1972, remembers his grandmother, Mama Seymour, who attended Baylor in Independence in the 1880s. For Gorham, there wasn't a thought of attending a university other than Baylor.

"Honestly, I never thought about going to any other college growing up because my mom was at Baylor," Gorham said. "My sister went there, my brother went there, so I just had never thought about going to another school."

The Gorhams bleed green and gold with Jim's grandmother, mother, three siblings, their spouses and his five grandchildren all having attended Baylor. Following his graduation from Baylor, Jim worked for a local accounting firm before returning to Baylor, where he worked in the comptroller's office for about 19 years.

His daughter Jenny James, a fifth-generation Baylor student and member of the Class of 1998, grew up on Baylor's campus. She fondly remembers going to festivals on the riverwalk and trick-or-treating in Collins, the dorm she later resided in.

"It's kind of a part of your DNA," James said. "Honestly, I didn't even know about other universities. It's just the next step, so I didn't even apply anywhere else. I didn't even look anywhere else."

James had a unique experience on campus with her father's office in Pat Neff, right next door to her dorm.

"I literally would see my dad every morning going to class," James said. "I literally could knock on his window and he would hand me money, so we were there together. We even shared a car."

Jenny's sons, Caleb and Carter James, are also part of the Baylor legacy, which brings her peace.

"It's like the easiest thing for me to send my kid to Baylor because I know the education they're getting," Jenny said. "I know the experience they're having."

Jenny's niece, Caroline Gorham, a Tulsa, Okla., sophomore and a sixth-generation Baylor Bear, said she feels blessed to be part of her family's legacy at Baylor. She remembers her Line Camp trip to Independence fondly, marking it as a key reminder of her family's history with Baylor.

"When we went to Independence, it was really neat because that's where my great-great-grandma went to school, so it was really almost emotional knowing that so much of my family has relied on Baylor," Caroline Gorham said.

The Myers family also smiles upon their time at Baylor, with Lois Myers, Class of 1968, remarking that she always knew she would go to Baylor.

"My mother graduated from Baylor in 1935, so I heard Baylor stories all my life, and so I never wanted to go anywhere else but Baylor," Lois said.

She graduated with her husband Dennis Myers, who



Photo courtesy of Arden Berry

FAMILY TIES Southlake sophomore Arden Berry (left), Woodway junior and freshman Lauren Myers (middle) and Molly Myers (right) are all cousins and multigenerational Baylor students who visited previous homecomings before enrolling at Baylor.

transferred to Baylor his junior year, and attributes his Baylor education to finding his calling.

Lois and Dennis both worked at Baylor, Lois in the Institute for Oral History and Dennis at the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work. They've had the privilege of seeing their children and now their three granddaughters attend Baylor.

"It's a dream," Lois said. "You start when they're babies and put them in Baylor clothes, at Christmas have Baylor ornaments on your tree and to have them choose to go to Baylor was fun. I think it's a wonderful undergraduate experience for them, and I think it will enhance their love of learning that I hope will last a lifetime."

Walking through campus, Lois and Dennis remember the memories they made in their undergraduate years, in their time as part of Baylor's faculty and in watching their children and grandchildren grow up on campus.

"The campus, the feel, the smells, the sensibilities of a place resonate with us," Dennis said. "Even today, when we're going to campus, it has the power to evoke those kinds of memories which are really good."

One of their granddaughters, Lauren Myers, grew up in Waco surrounded by Baylor culture. Now a junior, she enjoys the snippets of family history embedded in Baylor's campus, like the Armstrong Browning Library where her parents got engaged.

"We're in the same space, we're all trying to find what the next step in our lives are going to be, but then at the end of the day, I think it's unique to each of us," Lauren said. "I think that it's beautiful as well to see why campus is beautiful with them and be able to share why it's been impactful for me."

Brownsville senior Cassandra Delgado said she initially wanted to go anywhere other than Baylor, a sentiment echoed by Lauren Myers. But after touring campus with her dad, she knew Baylor was the school for her.

Her father Arthur Delgado and grandfather Arturo Delgado were both Baylor graduates, with her grandfather also being a part of the Baylor football team.

Cassandra remembers sharing her commitment with her grandpa, who had been suffering from Alzheimer's, and watching him light up at the memory of Baylor.

"When I brought up Pat Neff, and I showed him a picture of me in front of Pat Neff, he remembered the bears," Cassandra said. "I'm glad I was able to share that with him before he passed."

Jenny recalled the blessing that growing up in the Baylor tradition was for her and is for her family.

"When you grow up in it, you just don't know any difference until you get older and realize how special it is to have that kind of legacy and those traditions," Jenny said. "It's pretty incredible."

Homecoming Dr Pepper Hour connects students

ARDEN BERRY
Staff Writer

In 28 years, Baylor's Dr Pepper Hour has grown from a midweek treat to a beloved tradition.

With the help of a certain ice cream and beverage combination, Dr Pepper Hour kicked off a week of Homecoming events Tuesday in the Barfield Drawing Room.

Marblehead, Mass., sophomore Tyler Earp, a Chamber member leading the event, saw it feature photo opportunities with the Baylor mascots and the Dr Pepper Knight, free posters and, of course, Dr Pepper floats.

"It's a fun event, a nice break from classes," Earp said. "You get a free float and some pictures and a good kick off to homecoming."

According to the Student Activities website, Baylor put on "Coke Hour" from 1953 to 1997. In 1997, the event was renamed Dr Pepper Hour, as Baylor became Dr Pepper-exclusive.

Even before 1997, though, Dr Pepper was a part of Waco and Baylor history.

Dr Pepper Museum Associate Director Joy Summar-Smith said she found Dr Pepper advertisements in the Baylor Roundup yearbook as early as 1905.

"Paper advertising in yearbooks, and then the football programs came around in the '50s and '60s," Summar-Smith said. "Those are really fun to take a look at because you can see who Baylor was playing at that point in time."

Summar-Smith said Dr Pepper was invented in Waco in 1885.

"It was at the old corner drug store, which is the corner of Fourth and Austin Avenue," Summar-Smith said. "If you drive by that today, it's a very big parking lot for city hall, but that is where it was."

Summar-Smith said the Dr Pepper headquarters relocated to Dallas in the 1920s, but the Waco consumer base remained significant.

"All through this time period, the company's looking at per capita numbers, like how much Dr Pepper is drunk by the local population, how much is selling," Summar-Smith said. "Waco consistently is in the top across the country."

In 1906, she said an artesian manufacturing and bottling company building in Waco finished construction. In the 1960s, the bottling plant closed because the company began bottling Dr Pepper in cans, and the building was too small to

manufacture both.

"Eventually, Dr Pepper gives [the building] to Baylor," Summar-Smith said. "They use it as storage for a while, so there's another kind of connection with Dr Pepper here ... and then the idea comes about for the museum and the company buys the building back from Baylor and then donates it to the museum."

According to the Dr Pepper Museum website, the museum recently announced a new installation — a 23-foot high Dr Pepper bottle, set to be unveiled in May 2026 for its 35th anniversary.

Even now, the Dr Pepper Museum has connections to Baylor.

"Since then, we've also been going over the past couple of years, taking the float truck or serving Dr Pepper floats the way that we do it as part of Dr Pepper Hour every so often, too," Summar-Smith said.

Additionally, Summar-Smith said at least eight members of her staff, including herself, are Baylor alumni.

"One of the early leaders of the Dr Pepper Museum was a Baylor alumnus," Summar-Smith said. "He was a Dr Pepper drinker for many years, Wilton Lanning. So I think Waco has a lot of identity in Dr Pepper and a lot of identity in Baylor, and so they're just a natural partnership."

Currently, Summar-Smith said the Dr Pepper Museum has an exhibit about animals used in soft drink advertisements. One of the cases in the exhibit displays a cup, mug and commemorative bottles with the Baylor Bear logo, as well as a bear statue drinking Dr Pepper.

"When you think of animals and Dr Pepper, of course, the Baylor Bear is a really big part of that story," Summar-Smith said. "Fred Gildersleeve, a Waco photographer, was taking pictures of Baylor Bears drinking Dr Pepper back in the 1910s or '20s."

While bears no longer drink Dr Pepper, Dr Pepper Hour continues for Baylor students every Tuesday from 3 to 4 p.m.

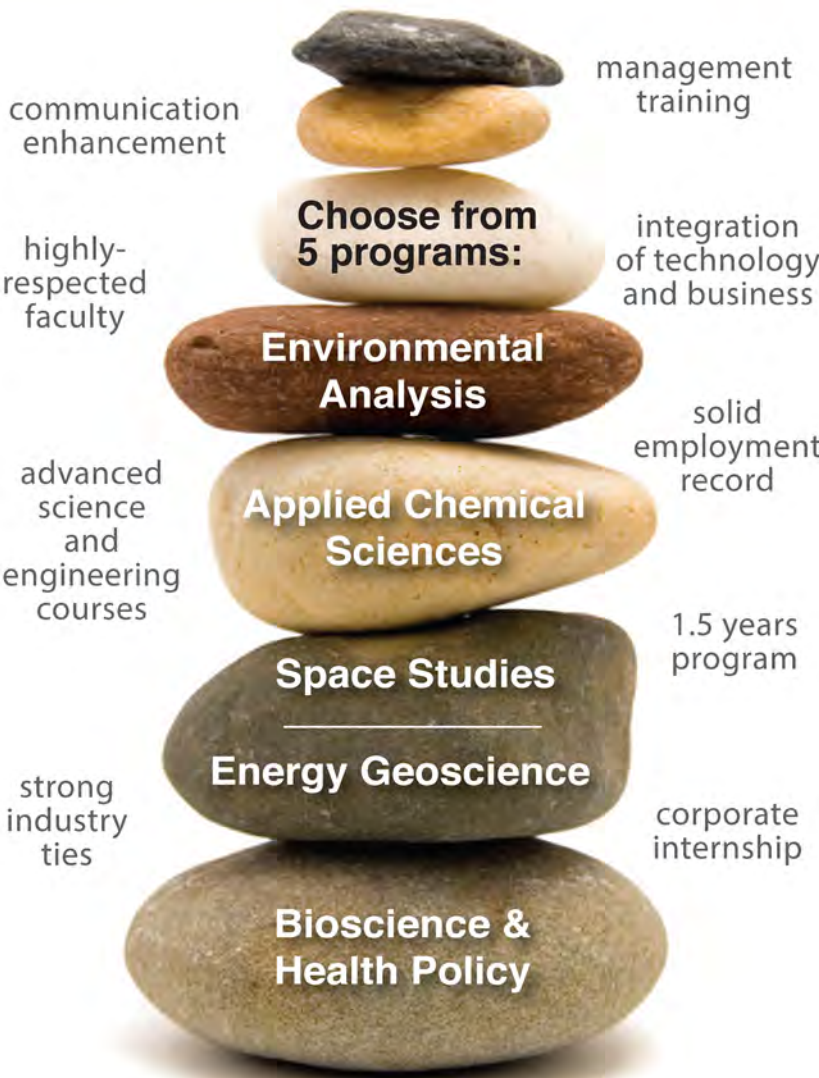
"It's a weekly tradition for students and faculty and staff to get to come together, enjoy a Dr Pepper float and just take a break during the week," said Sarah Patterson, associate director of Student Activities for Student Union and campus programs.

Sam Gassaway | Photographer

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News

Baylor Homecoming shines through new torchbearers

HANNAH WEBB
Focus Editor

Every fall, Baylor Homecoming begins in the heart of campus, where the glow of the Eternal Flame stretches across Fountain Mall. The Ten at Ten: A Mass Meeting Experience marks the start of the weekend as a moment when the Baylor Family gathers to celebrate tradition, renew community and reflect on the university’s motto: “Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana, Pro Mundo” — “For the Church, for Texas, for the World.”

The ceremony traces its roots to the story of the Immortal Ten — Baylor basketball players who lost their lives in a 1927 bus-train accident. What began as the Freshman Mass Meeting has evolved into a shared tradition for all students, symbolizing how Baylor’s spirit passes from one generation to the next beneath the steady flame of remembrance.

In 2009, the ritual took on a new form. The smudge pot once carried by freshmen was replaced with a torch, echoing the words of former Baylor President Samuel Palmer Brooks: “To you seniors of the past, of the present, of the future, I entrust the care of Baylor University. To you I hand the torch.”

Six years later, the Baylor Chamber of Commerce and the university installed the Eternal Flame monument on Fountain Mall — a permanent reminder of the light students are called to carry forward.

This year, that light will shine a little brighter. For the first time in Baylor’s long Homecoming history, a graduate student has been selected as a torchbearer — one of the students chosen to represent their class and embody Baylor’s values.

McKinney graduate student Katie Cox said being chosen to represent Baylor’s growing graduate

community feels like both an honor and a homecoming of her own. She began her time at Baylor in 2020, when the pandemic dimmed many of the traditions that define campus life.

“It feels like the perfect way to close my time at Baylor,” Cox said. “When I started in 2020, so many traditions didn’t happen. Now being able to take part in one of the oldest ones feels like passing the torch — literally and figuratively — to the next generation.”

Cox said she also sees the recognition as a reflection of how much Baylor’s graduate programs have grown in recent years.

“Graduate students are such a growing part of Baylor,” she said. “To be the first one representing them is really special. I want to be a shining light for my friends, for future grad students — for anyone who’s part of this community.”

That expansion in representation mirrors changes to the torchbearer selection process. Grand Junction, Colo., junior Brian Segers, a member of Chamber and coordinator for Ten at Ten, said this year’s process opened the application to all students for the first time, rather than relying on nominations.

“This year we wanted to make sure every student had a chance to apply,” Segers said. “Applicants wrote essays about how they live out Baylor’s motto — how their faith, service and sense of purpose reflect being ‘for the Church, for Texas, for the world.’”

The essays were reviewed anonymously, ensuring sincerity over status.

“We wanted people who truly cared about the idea of this — not just the recognition,” Segers said. “It’s about living Baylor’s mission every day, wherever you are.”

Among those chosen this year is Wayland, Iowa, freshman Tanner Egli, who represents the Class of

2029. Egli said the application’s focus on Baylor’s three pillars immediately caught his attention.

“The pillar that stood out to me most was ‘for the Church,’” Egli said. “That’s what drives me. To get to represent that as a freshman feels like being a trailblazer. I’m already a first-generation student, and now I get to blaze my own path here too.”

Egli said his first semester has been filled with tradition and energy, which is the heartbeat of campus.

“There are so many traditions, it’s hard to keep track of them all,” he said. “But that’s how you can tell how alive a campus is — by how many traditions it’s kept alive.”

Representing the freshman class, Egli said he hopes to inspire his peers to live with intention and faith.

“Our generation sometimes thinks it’s cool not to care,” he said. “But I’d tell my class it’s OK to care — to find what you’re passionate about and go all in, especially with your faith. Don’t be lukewarm.”

Segers said the torchbearers’ role goes beyond symbolism; it’s a living expression of Baylor’s calling to serve both locally and globally.

“Torchbearers are the upkeepers of the Baylor spirit,” he said. “They represent what it means to live ‘Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana, Pro Mundo’ — to take the light of Baylor into the world.”

As the Eternal Flame glows on Fountain Mall, the torchbearers continue a legacy more than a century old — one that links every generation through a single act of passing light. For Cox, that moment captures everything her time at Baylor has meant.

“From being a freshman who couldn’t attend Mass Meeting to closing out my time here as a torchbearer, it really feels full circle,” she said. “It’s the big goodbye — but it’s also a reminder that Baylor’s light doesn’t stay here. We carry it with us.”

HOCO PARADE from A1

unite at a place they call home.

A ‘94 Baylor graduate and Vice President for Engagement and Campaign Co-Director Toby Barnett said this sentiment is exactly what makes Baylor Homecoming fundamental to the Baylor experience.

“It’s the one time a year when everybody’s on campus,” Barnett said. “They’re all doing different things, but they’re all coming back to this place we call ‘home.’”

Further, homecoming turns the campus, normally swarming with college students, into a space filled with Bears young and old, students, future and past, and visitors near and far.

“They’re all there enjoying a tradition together that represents a time when they were students,” Barnett said. “It’s truly a special thing that doesn’t often happen at other

universities, but we see it year in, year out here at Baylor.”

According to a January 1910 edition of the Baylor University Bulletin, the first Baylor Homecoming was just that. The bulletin quotes a Waco Times-Herald article that recounted the event in its print.

“Proud of Old Baylor,” the bulletin reads. “Well, we should say so. With an origin antedating that of the state of Texas; with a history that has not one sullied page; with a purpose that contemplates both earth and heaven, Baylor is justly entitled to the love of her student body and to the reverence of those of us who have regard to the good, the true and the beautiful.”

This year’s parade will start downtown at 7 a.m. on Saturday. It’ll make its way to Baylor about 30 minutes in and is available for streaming on the Baylor University Facebook and YouTube accounts.

CRAZY TRADITIONS from A1

and W.M. Tryon also took place.

Flashing forward to the 1940s, a kissing tradition took root on Baylor’s campus. To protect Baylor from vandalism by rival schools, freshmen were tasked to guard the bonfire and the rest of the campus for the five nights leading up to the game.

By the 60s and 70s, kissing had become an integral part of this tradition, with a Lariat article from 1974 describing the barricade custom.

“The procedure for guarding the campus is to stop each car as it passes through campus,” The article reads. “If a Baylor student or ex-student will not kiss his date, his date must kiss each keeper of the barricade.”

According to the archives, the kissing barricades seem to phase out by the 80s, but the bonfire tradition remains as strong and bright as ever.

A tradition that might be more familiar to current students is the Baylor “slime caps,” small-billed baseball caps freshmen must wear until homecoming. This eventually transitioned to being worn only on the first day of school and is now

handed out to freshmen as they sign the line at McLane Stadium.

Hallsville freshman Hudson Daub, one of Rivera’s student researchers, said learning about Baylor’s traditions throughout the years has helped him feel closer to the university as a whole.

“Sometimes it’s easy for me to think of Baylor as just a school I go to, but this research has reframed that mindset,” Daub said. “Baylor has an expansive and rich culture that comes packaged with experience. Being a student at Baylor means being a part of a community that is both past, present and future.”

As traditions change and time passes, Rivera reminded students that being a part of homecoming is being part of history and the next generation.

“I think for me, what stands out with all of this is that humans don’t change,” Rivera said. “It’s the need for connection and the way people feel seen and heard through their creative works. Whether it’s the floats or the football players performing or if it’s the bonfire, it’s just a time to gather with people.”

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TIME LAPSE Baylor takes the field before its 2024 homecoming game against Oklahoma State, a 38-28 victory. The Bears have compiled a 51-43-4 record on homecoming.

Lariat file photo



YA HURD? Baylor wide receiver Jalen Hurd celebrates a touchdown during the Bears' 35-31 homecoming win over Oklahoma State in 2018.

Fly the W

Baylor football is 12-2 on homecoming since 2010

- '10: BU 47, Kansas State 42
- '11: BU 42, Missouri 39
- '12: BU 41, Kansas 14
- '13: BU 71, Iowa State 7
- '14: BU 60, Kansas 14
- '15: BU 45, Iowa State 27
- '16: BU 49, Kansas 7
- '17: West Virginia 38, BU 36
- '18: BU 35, Oklahoma State 31
- '19: BU 33, Texas Tech 30 (2OT)
- '20: Canceled due to COVID-19
- '21: BU 38, BYU 24
- '22: BU 35, Kansas 23
- '23: Iowa State 30, Baylor 18
- '24: BU 38, Oklahoma State 28
- '25: BU ?, UCF ?



MT. RUSH-MORE Fans flood the field after Baylor's 47-42 homecoming win over Kansas State in 2010.

Lariat file photo

Follow all of our homecoming football coverage on socials, Spotify and BaylorLariat.com



Coming home again

Bears prep for clash with Knights

JACKSON POSEY
Sports Editor

The nation's oldest homecoming football game is back.

A bonfire, concerts, class reunions and a parade down 11th street marked the first celebration in 1909. Organizers hoped alumni would "catch the Baylor spirit again."

The football team caught the spirit, winning 6-3 over TCU in the teams' third matchup that season. Five thousand fans graced Carroll Field for that game, with seniors donning caps and gowns for the occasion.

Now, 116 years later, the Bears (4-4, 2-3 Big 12) will look to get back in the win column against UCF (4-3, 1-3 Big 12).

"At the end of the day, it's just another game," junior tight end Matthew Klopfenstein said. "We need this win. We're going to go out and we're going to win. And so we're excited to give the fans a show and play our best game, and we're going in with a lot of confidence, and so we got nothing to lose."

The Bears are searching for answers after falling behind by over 20 points in consecutive weeks. A late comeback scrunched a 21-point deficit against rival TCU to a six-point loss, but the Bears never bounced back against No. 21 Cincinnati. The Bearcats opened with a 24-0 run and breezed to a 41-20.

"Yeah, we got hit in the mouth," redshirt senior quarterback Sawyer Robertson said. "You pick yourself off the mat and you go back to work, and you try to make the most of these last four opportunities."

With three conference losses, the Bears are all but out of the Big 12 championship hunt. Robertson, who leads the Big 12 in virtually every volume passing stat — including yards, touchdowns and interceptions — said the

team still has plenty of motivation.

"You play for the dudes in the locker room, you play for the school that you represent, all of that stuff," Robertson said. "And then obviously faith carries you through the whole thing. But yeah, there's still a ton to play for."

The Knights enter on the heels of a bye week, still riding the momentum of a 45-13 drubbing of West Virginia — their first win since Sept. 20. UCF lost its first three Big 12 games by a combined 30 points and have turned the ball over seven times in conference play.

The Knights' scoring defense, though, has been stellar. The unit ranks No. 16 in the nation and allowed only 20 points at Cincinnati on Nov. 11.

"They've got really good skill on offense, really good front people on defense," head coach Dave Aranda said. "It's a good team."

Still, the Knights have struggled with offensive inconsistency as health and performance issues linger. Running backs Myles Montgomery and Jaden Nixon have led a unit that's surpassed 20 points per game just twice against FBS opponents.

"They're explosive on offense," Aranda said. "Very, very multiple. I think they've got really good skill. Special teams is very explosive too, their returners are really dangerous."

The Bears are 1-2 against FBS teams at home this season, falling to Auburn 38-24 and Arizona State 27-24 and beating Kansas State 35-34. UCF is 0-2 on the road.

"It's super important, especially with it being the last game before a bye week," redshirt sophomore cornerback LeVar Thornton said. "Just to get back on our feet and then regroup in the bye week and come together."

Baylor will kick off its homecoming game against UCF at 11 a.m. Saturday at McLane Stadium. The game will be broadcast on ESPNU.

Former Bear Platt speaks on balancing homecoming

DYLAN FINK
Sports Writer

Homecoming is upon us.

Last touches are being put on floats, students are fighting to remember Pigskin dances, bonfires are being built and former NoZe Brothers are dusting off their old Groucho Marx glasses.

All these traditions and more are part of what makes Baylor Homecoming so famous. As students and alumni alike get caught up in all the noise of the oldest homecoming tradition in the nation, the football team has a much different approach to the weekend.

"I would say from a team's perspective, it was always just another week," former Baylor wide receiver Chris Platt said. "But at the end of the day, we always expect a good crowd."

Platt, ranked 11th on the Bears' all-time receiving yards leaderboard, donned the green and gold from 2014 to 2019. The former wide receiver finished his career with a then-team record 57 games played. (The record was surpassed last season by linebacker Matt Jones, who shared the field with Platt in 2019.)

The team's performance stands at the center of homecoming weekend; a grand event that concludes the celebration. Higher pressure and expectations are bound to come with preparation for the game.

"It can go one of two ways," Platt said. "Sometimes it's really motivating. You want to do well in front of the fans, and ideally, for homecoming, there should be a good crowd. It can also be very distracting with all the festivities going on. Like I said, definitely one of two ways."

Platt, who was one of the few players to stick with the program through the three-year coaching transition from Art Briles to Jim Grobe to Matt Rhule, had the opportunity to participate in a multitude of different homecoming experiences.

"I remember one year, Coach Briles brought us all to the bonfire, and seeing everyone there was awesome," Platt said. "I don't know if coach Rhule ever brought anybody with him; I think he might have, but it was probably just a few players."

The Bears went 5-1 in homecoming games during Platt's time at Baylor, including two particularly notable performances. A double-overtime thriller against Texas Tech in 2019 was capped off with a last-second field goal, giving the Bears the edge, 33-30.

In 2015, the No. 2-ranked Bears improved to 7-0 with a 45-27 win over Iowa State, 45-27, but the victory was bittersweet, as Heisman front-runner Seth Russell broke his neck in the fourth quarter.

"One of the most distracting was 2015 against Iowa State," Platt said. "It was raining really bad, and that was a big concern for a lot of people. Nobody showed up, and that really created mixed emotions toward the game for us on the team. At the end of the day, though, we knew what we needed to do to go out there and execute."

Platt has been active on social media for the past few seasons, criticizing Baylor fans' low game attendance and other gameday issues that have plagued the program recently.

"That was one of the things that, when I was a recruit, made me want to come to Baylor," Platt



Lariat file photo

PLATT TO THE FUTURE Chris Platt notched 114 yards in a 2018 win over Texas Tech. Platt has been outspoken on social media about Baylor's gameday experience.

said. "The crowd back then was electric. Now we can't even sell out McLane for homecoming."

Throughout all the other festivities going on during homecoming, Platt found game attendance to be the most distracting aspect of the weekend.

"Everybody wants to go to Pigskin, the

bonfire and the parade," Platt said. "It's always disheartening to the team when those events are packed and sell out, but we can't get our home stadium full for homecoming."

Baylor's Homecoming game will kick off against UCF at 11 a.m. Saturday at McLane Stadium. The game will be broadcast on ESPNU.



Roundup file photo

DOUBLE OVERTIME TROUBLE Baylor took down Texas Tech 33-30 in double overtime to win the homecoming game on Oct. 12, 2019. This marked the Bears' first overtime win on homecoming.

5 games that defined homecoming history

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Writer

Beginning in 1909, Baylor laid claim to the oldest homecoming in the nation. A football game has long been a staple of the storied tradition, along with a pep rally, bonfire and parade.

Baylor football stands at 50-43-4-4 all-time in homecoming games, including 17 wins in 35 contests against its most common opponent, TCU. The Bears are coming off a 38-28 win over Oklahoma State in last year's matchup. Here are five of Baylor's most memorable homecoming football moments.

1909 BAYLOR VS. TCU

With alumni returning to campus, students held a rally and bonfire the night before the game to inspire the team ahead of its matchup against rival TCU.

The Bears were set to close the 1909 season against TCU in the teams' third meeting that season. The Horned Frogs won the first two games 9-0 and 11-0, but Baylor had historically fared well in what was dubbed the Thanksgiving Day game, having lost only twice in those contests since 1898.

Roughly 5,000 fans packed Carroll Field, now known as Fountain Mall. The Bears were inspired by their success over the past few seasons and the support of hundreds of alumni who returned to campus.

Baylor played the better game through the first 10 minutes, but the Horned Frogs kicked a field goal to take a 3-0 lead. Then 14 minutes into the second half, the Bears scored a touchdown with a successful extra point to jump ahead 6-3. There was no more scoring for the rest of the game, and "the old bell pealed forth the glad tones of victory."

The occasion marked the first time Baylor alumni returned to their alma mater for the Thanksgiving Day game, and the festivities around it marked the first

homecoming, predating Missouri's 1911 and Illinois' 1910 claims.

1924 BAYLOR VS. TEXAS A&M

After the original homecoming in 1909, there would not be another one until 1915, and then not again until 1924, likely because of cost concerns.

In front of a crowd of 20,000 at the Texas Cotton Palace, the Bears prepared to take on the Texas A&M Aggies for their first Homecoming in nine years.

Following a scoreless first quarter, a penalty gave the ball to the Aggies on Baylor's 30-yard line. They scored first on a 30-yard touchdown pass to take a 7-0 lead. The Bears tried to work their way down the field but failed to score before halftime.

Baylor scored a rushing touchdown and missed the extra point on its first drive of the second half. The Bears took the lead soon after with a 63-yard scoop-and-score, followed by a blocked extra point to lead 12-7. They kicked a 43-yard field goal late in the fourth quarter to secure the 15-7 win over Texas A&M.

The matchup marked the third homecoming football game in Baylor history and began the annual tradition. Baylor has played in 97 homecoming matchups since 1924, missing only 1944 (World War II) and 2020 (COVID-19).

2006 BAYLOR VS. KANSAS

The Bears struggled on homecoming heading into their 2006 game against Kansas. They were in the midst of an eight-game homecoming losing streak dating back to 1998. Baylor, then 3-4, was facing off against an evenly-matched Kansas team that held the same record in 2006.

Both squads started the game with touchdowns on

their opening drives. The Jayhawks jumped ahead with a 28-yard pick-six.

The second quarter was all Kansas. The Jayhawks outscored the Bears 21-10 behind three touchdowns, a forced fumble and a Baylor missed field goal to go ahead 35-17.

After an empty third quarter, the Bears started to rally. Quarterback Shawn Bell threw his second interception of the game to start the final quarter. Feeling down and out, Bell and the offense regrouped. They strung together three consecutive touchdown drives to take a 36-35 lead with only one minute left in regulation.

A Dwain Crawford interception completed the dramatic 18-point comeback to end the program's longest homecoming losing streak — marking the Bears' first homecoming win since their 23-21 victory over Texas in 1997.

2013 BAYLOR VS. IOWA STATE

Baylor was looking to make its last season at Floyd Casey Stadium one to remember. The Bears started the season 5-0 and scored a combined 108 points in their first two conference games. Iowa State limped into the Bears' homecoming game, riding in at 1-4.

Through the first fifteen minutes, the Baylor faithful knew it would be a special night. After punting on their first drive, the Bears rattled off two touchdowns and a field goal to jump ahead 17-0 at the end of the first quarter. They continued to lay it on the Cyclones, reaching the end zone twice and making two more field goals to lead 37-0 at halftime.

The third quarter was Baylor's slowest. The Bears started with a Bryce Petty 6-yard rushing touchdown and finished with a 52-yard punt return touchdown from Levi Norwood to extend their lead to 51-0. They tallied two



Lariat file photo

THAT'S MY POP! A 1960 cartoon caricatures "Baylor's greatest rivals, the Texas Aggies." Baylor shut out Texas A&M in the 1960 homecoming game, 14-0.

more rushing touchdowns before Iowa State got on the board with 1:14 remaining in the game. Corey Coleman answered with a 97-yard kickoff return to cap off the onslaught at 71-7 and secure Baylor's program-record 10th straight win.

The game marked Baylor's largest margin of victory on homecoming at 64 points. The previous record was set in a 51-0 shutout win over TCU in 1915.

2019 BAYLOR VS. TEXAS TECH

Coming into its 2019 homecoming game, Baylor found itself at 6-0 overall and 2-0 in the Big 12. On the other side stood a surging Texas Tech team coming off a major 45-35 victory over No. 21 Oklahoma State, which saw quarterback Jett Duffey throw for a season-high 424 yards.

After a quiet first half, in which Tech led 6-3, Baylor scored two touchdowns to Texas Tech's one to open the third quarter. After multiple empty drives, the Red Raiders scored a go-ahead touchdown with 1:37 remaining in the fourth quarter. The Bears

ripped down the field on an 11-play, 89-yard drive that ended in a field goal to send the game to overtime.

Both squads made a splash in the first overtime, scoring touchdowns to make it a 27-27 game. In the second overtime, Baylor's defense was able to stop running back SaRodrick Thompson from converting on third-and-16, forcing a field goal.

The Bears worked the ball in only three plays, ending with a JaMycal Hasty 5-yard touchdown run to secure the first-ever overtime homecoming win.



Roundup file photo

TURKEY & TOUCHDOWN Baylor Homecoming began in 1909 with a rousing 6-3 win over TCU in "The Thanksgiving Game."



Roundup file photo

THRILLER Baylor broke its homecoming losing streak with a 36-35 win over Kansas in 2006.



Lariat file photo

FLOYD FINALE Baylor destroyed Iowa State 71-7 in 2013 for the final homecoming game at Floyd Casey stadium.

The Man from Waco

Midway grad Powell elevates game at Baylor

JACKSON POSEY
Sports Editor

Ten miles south of the Ferrell Center, a gangly teenager with hoop dreams lifted off.

It's tough for a 6-foot-10 athlete to blend in at Midway High School. Caden Powell sure didn't. Born less than four months after Baylor hired Scott Drew to head its basketball program and seasoned by a lifetime of Baylor games, he's now Drew's first scholarship player from Waco.

"It's a true blessing to have somebody from Waco on the team," Drew said of Powell, who transferred to Baylor this offseason. "I know just what the jersey means to him and what a great teammate and leader he's been on the team."

Powell grew up playing with the neighborhood kids until the lights turned off. He played soccer, too, but times are hard for goalies.

"There'd be times where I'd just be sitting on the ground, just picking at

grass and throwing it," Powell said. "Basketball is a lot more fun. It's also on TV."

As a child, Powell would sit in the living room, entranced by the glowing athletes on the screen. When it came time, he would hop in the back of his mom's car to make the pilgrimage to basketball camps and games at the Ferrell Center. It was a blessing, so close to home, to "see what they do on TV."

"You're in an area where the college team is good at basketball," Powell said. "[It was] like, 'If you want to be good at basketball, you're going to have to do this, and there's a school — and if you're good enough, you can go play basketball there.' ... Trying to get to the point where it's like, 'OK, well if they know about you, then that means other people know about you, and that means you're doing something right.'"

Sometimes, though, a bird needs to stretch its wings. As he matured, Powell began telling coaches that he

wanted to play college ball outside of Texas.

"My mom was like, 'I'm going to drive and I'm just going to show up on campus whenever I can,'" Powell said. "I was like, 'I'm not dealing with that or taking that risk.'"

Powell enrolled at Wyoming, his farthest Division I offer and spent two years playing for the Cowboys in snowy Laramie. He averaged 5.4 points and 4.6 rebounds per game as a sophomore before transferring to Rice. After a two-year escapade in the mountains, it was time to come home.

"I [wanted] to be able to see my family a little bit more," Powell said. "I was able to see my mom a lot more ... just the proximity, being closer to home."

Powell took a massive step forward for Rice, leading the Owls in scoring during conference play and improving his field goal percentage from 48.2% to 56.5% on higher volume. As soon as he entered the transfer portal, Baylor assistant Tweety Carter — who'd been monitoring his progress since high school — came calling.

"I had probably seven or eight missed calls from 'Tweety Carter,'" Powell said. "Got back to my phone and I see eight missed calls — five of them are FaceTimes, three of them are calls ... four texts, like, 'Call me whenever you're free.'"

The pair have known each other for years. Four years ago, Carter spoke at a Midway banquet and, in Powell's words, "sweat through his suit because he was nervous." So when Powell FaceTimed him back, the conversation was jovial. Drew called soon after.

"With so many new guys, he definitely gave them the shortcut versions of where to eat, where to go, what to do in Waco," Drew said.

That little kid from Waco would be in awe of where he is today, Powell



GOOD VIBES Senior forward Caden Powell brings the energy to first practice at Foster Pavilion.



HOMETOWN HERO Senior forward Caden Powell rises up against a Grand Canyon defender in opening exhibition game at Foster Pavilion.

Caleb Garcia | Photographer

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Photo courtesy of Baylor University Archive - Athletics

HOG WILD Quarterback Mark Jackson hands the ball off to running back Greg Hawthorne in Baylor’s 1976 homecoming football game against No. 12 Arkansas. The game was the fourth and final tie in Baylor Homecoming history, ending in a 7-7 tie.

Bears battle to a draw

4 times the Bears stalemated on homecoming

DYLAN FINK
Sports Writer

1923. 1936. 1938. 1976.

Four seasons that saw the annual homecoming game in Waco end in the most confusing way for fans to contemplate their emotions. A tie.

“Nobody likes playing for ties, and ain’t nobody here is going to be kissing their sister,” Jason Sudeikis said in the hit show “Ted Lasso.”

Sudeikis radiated the energy of legendary Alabama coach Paul “Bear” Bryant, who is often credited with originating the now-iconic phrase. Four unique Baylor homecoming games fit that category.

1923: Baylor 0 Texas A&M 0

The Bears’ first homecoming tie took place Nov. 3, 1923, against historic rival Texas A&M. The game, which finished with a 0-0 final score, was described as a “deadlock” by the Associated Press.

“Baylor’s undefeated Southwest Conference eleven and the Texas Aggies’ team were punting, slipping and fighting across the muddy cotton palace gridiron,” the AP recap read.

“The ball, for the most part, was kept at midfield.”

The first of the four ties was plagued by reports of heavy rain and an overly muddy field. It’s safe to say Baylor fans who showed up for that year’s homecoming game did not experience the epic highs and lows of early 20th-century Southwest Conference football.

1936: Baylor 0 Texas A&M 0

1936 saw another scoreless tie between the two teams on the Brazos. The highlight of the weekend was not the teams’ lackadaisical performance, but rather the night before the game, when Texas A&M students pranked Baylor’s campus.

The Baylor fandom awoke the Saturday morning of the game to find Texas A&M propaganda plastered across campus, including a massive sign hanging from Waco Hall that read “A&M 50 - Baylor 0.” The final score was much less impressive.

1938: Baylor 6 Texas A&M 6

1938 featured, yet again, a tie against the Texas A&M Aggies.



Photo courtesy of Baylor University Archive - Athletics

FULL STEAM AHEAD Running back Greg Hawthorne trails his blocker while trying to break off a run against Arkansas.

Baylor, ranked No. 17 going into the matchup, was described as “battered” by the AP coming into the homecoming matchup.

“Crippled and helpless before Aggie charges until the enemy leaked past its ten-yard stripe, the Baylor line dug in while rain pelted their faces and slapped defeat in the face twice while 15,000 fans screamed in frustration,” the recap read.

Another rainy, muddy homecoming matchup between the Bears and their rivals from 90

minutes down Highway 6 ended with a disheartening tie. In 1938, the unsatisfying ending to the game led the Bears to take two conference losses throughout the rest of the season, taking the onetime favorites out of the Southwest Conference championship race.

1976: Baylor 7 Arkansas 7

Forty-eight years after the Bears’ last homecoming tie, Waco saw a

Grant Teaff-led Baylor team match up against the Arkansas Razorbacks.

For a team that was only two years removed from a Southwest Conference title and four away from another, the 1970s proved to be a renaissance for Baylor football.

The Bears came into homecoming weekend beaten down on the heels of a 24-0 demolition by Texas A&M at Kyle Field. Hoping to gain momentum on the season, Baylor turned its attention to a homecoming matchup against the No. 12 Razorbacks.

A defense-heavy game in front of a sold-out crowd at Baylor Stadium saw a 7-7 deadlock between the two Southwest Conference teams. Simply being competitive with a top-15 team gave the Bears a sliver of hope for the rest of what was expected to be a very successful season for the green and gold. (The Bears finished the season 7-3-1.)

After the Bears’ first three homecoming ties left a sour taste in fans’ mouths, the 1976 tie made Baylor fans thankful their talented team was finally gaining momentum and competing with top teams.

Baylor’s 2025 homecoming game against UCF will kick off at 11 a.m. Saturday at McLane Stadium. The game will be broadcast on ESPNU.

NCAA shift in 1981 lays foundation for women’s sports

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Writer

In the early years of Baylor volleyball, luxury was not an option. Traveling throughout Texas and out of state for tournaments, it was up to the Bears and their staff to drive the vans for away matches.

“I would go pick up a van, pick up the stuff that we needed for the trip, get all of that together because there just wasn’t a huge coaching staff,” former Baylor student athletic trainer Pam Rast said.

The players packed into motels on the road, excited for the opportunity to watch TV.

“We would stay at Motel 6, three or four of us to a room,” said Rast, who was at Baylor from 1978-83. “We got all excited when the coach would come out to the van and hand us all keys because we knew that those were

the keys to the TV set.”

Even at home, Baylor did not have facilities of their own on campus, playing at Spenco Aerobics Center and working out in the football weight room.

“We never played on campus,” said Ann Blockhus Martin, who played on the Bears’ first NCAA volleyball team. “We played at Spenco ... it was a big gymnastics gym, and then they had the volleyball court, and then they had the tennis.”

Starting in 1981, multiple women’s sports, including volleyball, moved from the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) to the NCAA. While the facilities and revenue took more time to grow, the shift marked a new chance for female collegiate athletes.

“It was all about the opportunity to compete,” Rast said. “The opportunities that have been made

available for women in athletics as a result of the move to NCAA ... It’s given women the same opportunities, essentially, in life and in business that the men had.”

The landmark enactment of Title IX in 1972 and the move to the NCAA in 1981 created new openings for athletes and other women working with teams, including athletic trainers like Rast, who is now a professor, program director and kinesiology department chair at Texas Wesleyan University.

“It opened a lot of doors for me,” Rast said. “If it hadn’t been for Title IX ... from an athletic perspective, I wouldn’t have the career that I have today.”

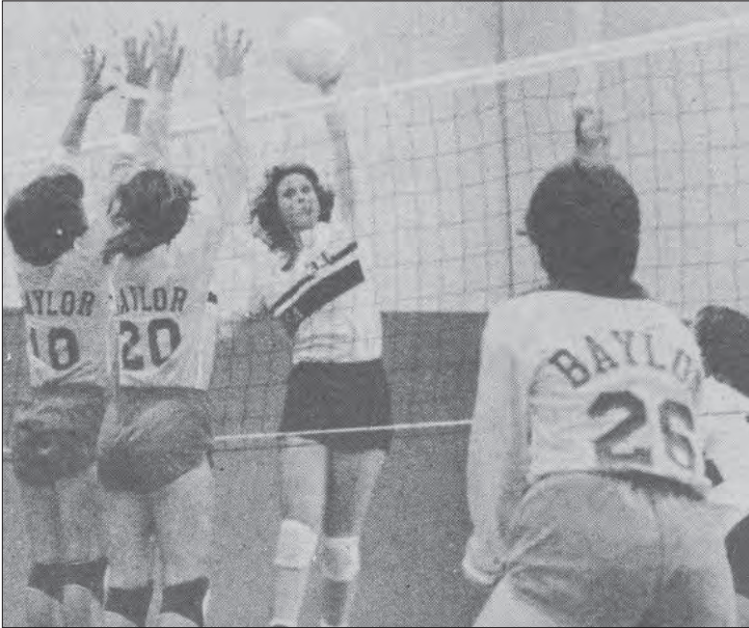
Some athletes were less consciously focused on making history or being a part of the progress in women’s athletics — they just wanted to play and compete against some of the best programs.

“We were kids, we were in school, we were playing volleyball,” Martin said. “We were playing other huge programs who already had a huge program, like UT.”

College volleyball’s landscape contained a variety of programs competing. New, up-and-coming teams like Baylor played against more proven and financially supported programs, such as Texas.

“There was quite a diverse group of teams that we played versus now,” Martin said.

Baylor’s 1981 volleyball team has appreciated the strides that have been made over the 44 years since moving to the NCAA. The volleyball program now shares the Ferrell Center and its facilities only with acrobatics and tumbling. Women’s basketball moved into Foster Pavilion with the men’s team. Softball has presided at



Lariat file photo

BLOCK PARTY Baylor volleyball players Sara Minton and Lee Baugh block an attack from a Stephen F. Austin player in 1981.

Getterman Stadium since 1999.

“Women in sports have come leaps and bounds as to where we were,” Martin said. “We were in a gymnastics gym, and our girls now have their own arena to play in.”

It took the Bears 18 years to make the tournament after joining the NCAA. They made three more tournament appearances in 2001, 2009 and 2011 before becoming a powerhouse under current head coach Ryan McGuyre. Baylor has reached nine consecutive NCAA tournaments, along with a semifinal appearance in 2019 as the No. 1 overall seed.

“He’s a great role model for these girls, and he builds leaders,” Martin said. “We were just playing, versus Ryan has a mission.”

There is still a strong connection

between different generations of Baylor volleyball players. Martin and her 1981 teammates have been able to form bonds with players who have reached other milestones to continue supporting the program they helped build.

“Being an athlete at Baylor puts you in a special group because I could reach out to other Baylor volleyball people,” Martin said. “They have had reunions in the past, and we have seen people from other timeframes — the 2000s, the 1990s — so I’m friends with some of them only because we’re Baylor alum and Baylor volleyball alum.”

The Bears will continue their run for a 10th straight NCAA tournament appearance when they take on Colorado at 8 p.m. Friday at CU Events Center in Boulder, Colo.



Roundup file photo

NEXT STEPS Team photo for the 1981 Baylor volleyball team. They were part of the move of women’s sports from the Association for Intercollegiate Athletis for Women (AIAW) to the NCAA.

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2 years, 2 titles, 1 legacy

The era that redefined Baylor soccer

MARISSA ESSENBURG
Sports Writer

As the final seconds ticked away at Betty Lou Mays Field, hugs turned into tears and cheers filled the night air. Baylor soccer had done it again — two years, two trophies, one unforgettable era.

2017 and 2018 are two seasons forever etched into Baylor soccer history. Two years that cemented names, titles and postseason runs that would shape the program for years to come.

Under then-head coach Paul Jobson, the Bears built more than just a winning team — they built a culture. Those back-to-back Big 12 titles weren't flukes; they came from a locker room that refused to quit, a program that learned how to believe and a roster that blended talent, toughness and faith in equal measure.

“We got toward the end of the 2017 season and weren't even sure we'd make it to the Big 12 tournament,” Jobson said. “Then we just hit a run. After TCU handed it to us, the girls had a wake-up call — kind of a come-to-Jesus moment where they asked, ‘What do we want to be? What do we want to do?’ It was unbelievable the way we finished.”

From the wake-up call of 2017 to the dominance of 2018, Baylor's rise was built on resilience — the answer to a question that once shaped who the Bears wanted to be.

That resilience still defines the program today. Seven years later, the team chases the same dream and heads into a postseason that feels all too familiar to those 13-5-2 and 15-4 campaigns in 2017 and 2018, respectively.

After a 10-season stretch with only three winning records, 2017 marked the year Jobson's vision finally came to fruition.

Led by upperclassmen Sarah King and Lauren Piercy, Baylor rediscovered its identity through grit and unity. The Bears rattled off four straight wins to end the regular season, clawing their way back into contention before storming through the Big 12 tournament.

Baylor capped the tournament with a 3-0 sweep through the Big 12 Championship, avenging three regular-season overtime losses along the way. The run ended with the program's second conference title, a repeat of its 2012 win over TCU, as the Bears lifted the Big 12 tournament trophy once again.

The Bears brought home the hardware and plenty of recognition as their Big 12 title win punched a ticket to the NCAA tournament — the program's first postseason berth since 2012. Senior midfielder Aline De Lima earned Big 12 Soccer Championship Offensive Most Outstanding Player honors, becoming just the third Baylor player to do so, joining Courtney Saunders (1996) and Dana Larsen (2012).

Baylor also placed five players on the Big 12 All-Tournament Team: defenders Precious Akanyirige and King, midfielders De Lima and Julie James and forward Piercy.



Photo courtesy of Big 12 Conference

LEGACY IN ACTION Baylor wins the Big 12 Soccer Championship at Swope Soccer Village in Kansas City, Mo., on Nov. 5, 2017.

With the championship victory, Baylor secured the Big 12's automatic bid to the NCAA tournament, completing a six-year climb back to the postseason.

What began as a breakthrough in 2017 became a blueprint in 2018. Baylor entered the new season with a target on its back and a mission to turn one magical run into a lasting legacy.

And a legacy they created — growing from a 13-win team into a 20-win powerhouse that delivered Baylor its 105th Big 12 championship and the fourth in soccer program history. Led by a veteran core that included Julie James and Camryn Wendlandt, the Bears embraced the pressure that came with being defending champions. They finished the regular season 20-6 overall and 8-1 in Big 12 play, their most dominant stretch under Jobson.

In a 1-0 win over Oklahoma to close the regular season, Wendlandt's early strike sealed Baylor's Big 12 regular-season title and 12th shutout of the year, solidifying one of the stingiest

defenses in the country. The Bears climbed as high as No. 9 in the national rankings and earned another postseason bid, culminating in their second straight trip to the NCAA Elite Eight.

“To be able to turn around and do it again the next year — back-to-back Big 12 champions and Elite Eight runs — it was special,” Jobson said. “That group really bought into our vision.”

If 2017 was the season Baylor found belief, 2018 was when it found its identity — a team that didn't just surprise people but set the standard for what Baylor soccer could be — thirty years of Baylor soccer, back-to-back years of Big 12 dominance and a legacy that still echoes through the program today. Those 2017 and 2018 teams didn't just win championships — they changed what was possible.

Now seven years later, a new generation of Bears carries that same belief into another postseason, chasing a Big 12 title of their own and writing the next chapter in Baylor's story.

PGA tour veteran Crane reflects on time at Baylor

DYLAN FINK
Sports Writer

The best golfer Baylor has ever had never even competed for the green and gold.

Professional golfer and PGA tour veteran Ben Crane has accumulated five tour wins, including the 2014 FedEx St. Jude's Classic, over his 23-year career on the tour. The Portland, Ore., native is best known throughout college golf for his time playing for the University of Oregon, but is now reflecting upon his first year of college spent down in Waco.

“Texas has obviously produced tons of PGA Tour golfers,” Crane said. “Growing up in Oregon and wanting to do this professionally, I just thought that making it down to Texas, where I could play year-round, would be great.”

Crane came to the Bears as a redshirt for the 1994-95 season. While he did not see a tee box at any competitive event throughout his year in Texas, the now-tenured professional is one of the best golfers Baylor has ever produced.

When Crane came to the program in 1994, the landscape of golf in Waco was not as well-maintained as it has been in recent years.

“My brother went to Baylor a year before me and he just absolutely loved the school,” Crane said. “I went down there to visit him and met the coach, and he offered me to come play for Baylor.”

Crane came to Baylor at the close of then-head coach Gene Shields' career, which affected Crane's experience in his redshirt season. Looking for an opportunity to grow and develop his game, Crane turned toward his teammates.

“My coach was getting ready to retire at the end of the year,” Crane said. “But the guys on the team were really bought

in, and that was huge to me.”

Crane remains involved in the Baylor golf sphere, as he and current men's head coach Mike McGraw have collaborate on encouraging Christian fellowship among younger golfers in their journey to the Tour.

“If McGraw was the coach when I was at Baylor, I never in a million years would've transferred,” Crane said. “The school was great, I loved the town, I loved going to Vitek's and crushing Gut Paks all the time. If I had gotten a coaching experience [that McGraw] provides those kids with, I never would have left.”

Crane has hosted groups of young adult golfers at his home as part of a College Golf Fellowship retreat that McGraw leads every year.

“What McGraw does is he turns his athletes into Godly men,” Crane said. “I love spending time with him whenever I can, but I know for a fact we're going to hang out a lot in heaven when we both get there.”

Baylor golf alum Johnny Keefer recently made it off the Korn Ferry Tour, the qualifying tour for the PGA, and earned his official PGA Tour card. Keefer's recent success has Crane reflecting on not just his time in Waco, but also his experience coming up as a young player on the tour.

“People always ask when I knew I was good enough to make the tour, but ... you don't know until you finally make it,” Crane said.

The Portland native was introduced to golf by his grandfather when he was five years old, and grew up playing the Portland Golf Club course.

“Every putt I hit on the putting green late at night as a kid, I was there dreaming I was doing something great as a PGA golfer,” Crane said. “That feeling when I actually made

[the Tour] was that I couldn't actually believe that I had achieved the dream I had had since I was a little kid.”

Crane said that if he could give any advice to Keefer as a young golfer coming out of Baylor, it would be to find someone to look up to. When Crane was coming onto the tour, he found a mentor in longtime PGA veteran Chris DiMarco.

“Chris told me to just be me,” Crane said. “That's the advice I would want to give Johnny Keefer if I could. Just let him know that there's a lot of things that make you unique as a golfer and to just find what that is for him and be comfortable in it.”

Crane's unique thing he was able to find for himself was making YouTube videos to have fun on tour. His progression of videos led to the famous “Golf Boys” video that starred alongside Crane, Oklahoma State alum Rickie Fowler and two-time Masters winner Bubba Watson.

“All those guys approached me about doing a video together, and so we became the Golf Boys,” Crane said. “When it blew up, I just remember Bubba saying ‘We're breaking barriers, we're breaking barriers!’ because the PGA was much more uptight at the time.”

While only at Baylor for a year, Crane ranks among the greatest golfers to come through the banks of the Brazos.

“It's very cool and flattering to get to be considered in that category,” Crane said. “I'm very thankful to have been a Bear, and I do have school pride. My brother and his wife graduated from Baylor, and when it comes to the golf program, there's not many people who are bigger Coach McGraw fans than me. Even though it was only just one year, I have very fond memories of being there.”

RL

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Built for the big stage

Baylor women’s basketball’s lasting legacy in the WNBA

MARISSA ESSENBURG
Sports Writer

There’s no program west of the Mississippi — and few in the nation — that has seen success quite like Baylor women’s basketball.

In the past 20 seasons, Waco has witnessed 13 conference titles, 23 consecutive NCAA tournament runs, four Final Fours and three national championships from the Baylor women’s basketball team alone. The program has spent 436 weeks ranked in the Top 25 and produced 25 players who’ve gone on to play in the WNBA — the seventh most of any program in the country.

Sophia Young-Malcom. NaLyssa Smith. Brittney Griner. Three stars, three eras, one standard. Add 22 more, and you’ve got two full WNBA rosters worth of players powered by the green and gold.

“This generation gets to grow up dreaming of playing on that stage, and I think [that’s] the way we [at Baylor] play,” head coach Nicki Collen said. “We talk about the game the same way. The way I coach — not every player is going to be good enough to play in the WNBA, but certainly how we teach the game is going to prepare them.”

A former WNBA Coach of the Year, Collen has coached five Bears — including two top-10 draft picks — who’ve stepped onto basketball’s brightest stage since arriving in Waco in 2021: Caitlin Bickle (Connecticut Suns), Queen Egbo (Las Vegas Aces), NaLyssa Smith (Las Vegas Aces), Jordan Lewis (Connecticut Suns) and Aaronette Vonleh (Dallas Wings).

The Baylor pipeline didn’t begin overnight. Sheila Lambert and Danielle Crockrom were the first to open the door, drafted just four picks apart in 2002, at Nos. 7 and 11, proving Baylor belonged on basketball’s biggest stage.

But it wasn’t until the 2005 season that the program redefined what Baylor women’s basketball could be — the year that raised the first championship banner into the rafters of the Ferrell Center.

Four years after Baylor saw its first women’s basketball players drafted to the big leagues, Young-Malcolm turned belonging into believing. After leading the Bears to a 33-3 national championship run, she became the program’s third-ever WNBA draft pick and a



Lariat file photo

GREATNESS Legend Brittney Griner is one of the many elite Bears to make the WNBA.

cornerstone for the legacy still unfolding today. Selected No. 4 overall by San Antonio in 2006, she turned her decade-long career into proof that Baylor greatness doesn’t end in Waco, rather the legacy only begins.

For five straight years (2005-09), Baylor players heard their names called on draft night as the program proved itself among the nation’s most consistent pipelines to the pros. Those seasons built the foundation for what came next: one of the most dominant runs college basketball has ever seen.

40-0. Numbers etched into Baylor history.

The first NCAA team to ever reach such perfection, the 2011-12 Bears didn’t just win;

they dominated college basketball. Led by Baylor legends Griner and Odyssey Sims, and built on relentless defense, unmatched chemistry and a generational roster, Baylor completed a flawless 40-0 season, defeating Notre Dame in the national championship game behind a combined 45 points from Griner and Sims to claim its second title and cement its place in college basketball history.

“It’s been a great year for Baylor,” former head coach Kim Mulkey said after the championship game. “It’s just a fun time. I look forward to going back. Let’s enjoy it. This is a memory. This is for Baylor.”

That season wasn’t just about the nets that came down. It was about raising the bar for what greatness in green and gold could mean.

Griner made history once again in 2013, when the Phoenix Mercury made her the first player in Baylor history to be selected No. 1 overall in the WNBA Draft. Teammate Brooklyn Pope was taken two rounds later by the Chicago Sky.

A year later, Griner’s championship point guard followed suit. Sims — a Baylor and Big 12 single-season scoring record holder, All-American and national player of the year finalist — didn’t wait long to hear her name called. The Tulsa Shock selected Sims with the No. 2 overall pick in the 2014 WNBA Draft, making her Baylor’s sixth first-round selection and 10th player drafted overall.

Over the next five seasons (2012-17), the Bears posted a 201-19 record, winning five straight conference championships and producing four WNBA draft picks in Niya Johnson, Alexis Jones, Alexis Prince and Kristy Wallace.

That 201-19 record grew to 238-20 by the 2018-19 season, when the Bears made another historic national championship run.

The hashtag #TogetherToTampa was born, as Baylor once again edged past the Fighting Irish, this time in an 82-81 thriller. Seniors Chloe Jackson and Kalani Brown combined for a legendary 46-point performance, while freshman NaLyssa Smith stepped up with 14 crucial points after Lauren Cox went down with a knee injury in the third quarter.

“Coaches can try every year to have great team chemistry,” Mulkey said. “They can lead them and guide them, but sometimes you just

get a group of girls where you sit back and go, ‘They’ve got it.’ And this bunch had it.”

That bunch went on to have seven players hear their names called on draft night. Brown and Jackson were selected with the Nos. 7 and 15 picks in 2019, respectively, followed by Cox (No. 3) and Juicy Landrum (No. 35) in 2020 and DiDi Richards (No. 17) in 2021. The two freshmen from that team, Smith and Queen Egbo, rounded it out in 2022, going No. 2 and No. 10 overall.

That draft marked the second time in program history Baylor had three players selected in the same WNBA Draft, as Smith, Egbo and Jordan Lewis each joined the league in 2022.

After finishing her Baylor career as one of the most decorated Bears in program history, Smith added to her legacy at the next level. A two-time Big 12 Player of the Year, back-to-back Katrina McClain Award winner and seven-time All-American selection, she left Waco as one of the most dominant forwards in women’s college basketball.

Three years into her WNBA career, Smith became the second former Bear to win both a national championship and a WNBA title when the Las Vegas Aces claimed their third championship in four years.

“Being around people that respected what she brought to the table and being able to impact the game, to see her thrive down the stretch to be a huge part of their turnaround, definitely a proud coach moment,” Collen said.

The pipeline is still flowing. Most recently, Vonleh became Baylor’s latest WNBA draft pick, hearing her name called by the Dallas Wings in 2025.

“This generation has grown up with college being kind of a stepping stone to the WNBA,” Collen said. “Super excited for them and to have more future pros on our roster.”

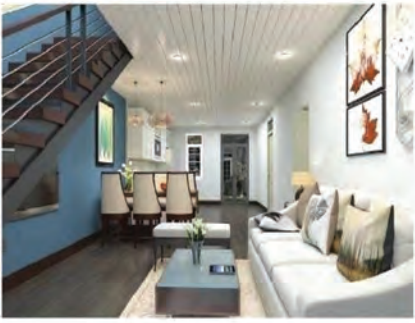
Baylor’s impact on the WNBA is undeniable. With 11 first-round picks and 25 total draft selections, the Bears now rank fourth among all colleges for most active players in the league with seven, including five on this year’s playoff rosters.

Two decades, three championships and 25 WNBA draft picks later, Baylor’s message to the basketball world remains the same. The standard doesn’t stop in Waco — it starts there.

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Día de los Muertos to parade colorful alebrijes Saturday



Lariat file photo

SWIRLING SKIRTS Participants in last year's monarch-themed Día de los Muertos parade performed a traditional Mexican Jalisco folk dance.

OLIVIA TURNER
Arts & Life Editor

Creative Waco's annual Día de los Muertos is back for its fifth year, this time for the biggest, most colorful celebration the city has seen yet.

The festival will run from 4-10 p.m. on Saturday at Indian Spring Park. This year's event will debut a bright, multicolored "alebrije" theme, said Julie Cervantes, parade director for Día de los Muertos and director of strategic development at Creative Waco. Cervantes said she expects attendees to go all out with the theme through costumes and parade floats this year.

"I've seen some people doing a leopard print body suit, but then they're putting on butterfly wings with a cat mask, and then deer antler horns, and they're using Posca paint markers or spray painting, and they're just having fun," Cervantes said. "The creativity is unmatched. I've seen some groups, even the police department ... they got this papier-mache Clifford the Big Red Dog, and I can't wait to see the final product."

The concept of celebrating the Day of the Dead was born from the Mexican Renaissance in the early 1900s after a period of dictatorship and loss of indigenous identity, Cervantes said. "Alebrijes" followed soon after, thanks to Mexico City visual artist Pedro Linares, who dreamt up the creatures in a fever and began replicating them through the art of papier-mache.

Along with the "alebrijes" theme, Cervantes said Día de los Muertos is partnering with several local animal shelters — the Humane Society, Pet Circle, ABC Clinic and Fuzzy Friends — to include Waco's own animals in the celebration and even to allow locals the chance to adopt them.

The pets will be held in a fenced-in "alebrije garden," according to Cervantes. The garden will have several five-foot-tall cardboard cutouts in the shapes of alebrijes like jaguars, eagles and cats scattered throughout. A couple animal shelters will even have their four-legged

participants heading the parade to resemble the spirit animals, Cervantes said.

Baylor is involved with much of the creative process for this year's festival, she said. Ryan Joyner, an assistant professor of sound design at Baylor, partnered with Creative Waco to create an interactive T-shirt to be sold at this year's festival, featuring the alebrije theme. Cervantes said the shirts can also be preordered online.

Joyner is using augmented reality, a creative process that overlays digital information like images, text and 3D models onto the real world. Simply by holding up a phone camera to a QR code on the T-shirt, the woman depicted on the logo will come to life, transforming into different forms of alebrijes.

Cervantes said a small class in the philanthropy department called Creative Economies will be contributing to the parade by creating a lantern bird puppet in the Moody Makerspace, crafted out of bamboo sticks, muslin wrap and LED lights. In the class, students learn about the relationship between the arts and the economy and how they can cultivate social cohesion.

"We want just everyone to be able to appreciate all of our community," Cervantes said. "Every culture has something to be celebrated."

Eric Linares, Events Director at Creative Waco, said hosting the event at Indian Spring Park holds more significance than just space to celebrate — it's where the Hispanic community's history is preserved and honored.

"Staying in that area also helps honor some of that legacy, and shows that the Hispanic culture is still alive and thriving in downtown Waco," Linares said.

This year's festival will feature an expansive lineup of the usual entertainment, such as musicians, dancing and parade performers. There will also be food trucks, local vendors and several zones for families and young children to play and relax, Linares said.

Preceding the first Creative Waco Día de los Muertos festival was a traveling ofrenda started by a local, Rocio Ramirez-Landoll. Linares



Lariat file photo

PARADE IN THE PARK Last year's parade theme was "Year of the Monarch," and this year's theme is "alebrijes," which are colorful creatures acting as spirit guides in the next life.

said he and a few other community members, including Cervantes, gathered to kickstart the first Waco Día de los Muertos. Since then, the celebration has grown from a small-scale celebration to a citywide event sponsored by big names like Baylor and H-E-B, and partnering with Waco Restaurant Week.

A total of 60 entries will walk in this year's parade, the most they've ever had, Cervantes said.

"We weren't sure how it was going to go this year, and we've never had to do this, but we had to turn people away from the parade," Cervantes said. "We exceeded our permitted spacing, and there's a bunch more people on the wait list. But we can't. We don't have permitting to take up any more city street ... we exceeded our limit about three weeks ago."

Cervantes said along with her many responsibilities like theme and logo development and communications with parade participants, there are several other behind-the-scenes factors to hosting a public festival in downtown Waco, such as security, road closure, portable toilets and hiring emcees and judges for the various competitions.

Together with her team, Cervantes is implementing several creative additions to this year's festival, such as projection mapping onto the Waco Suspension Bridge. Another is the implementation of "sicoustics," a sound system that will spread all throughout the festival and parade so attendees in all areas can experience the music and announcements emitting from the stage. This will also allow emcees to announce when parade participants arrive at the turnaround.

Linares said he hopes all who are interested in Día de los Muertos, of Hispanic descent or not, will come to check out what this year's event has to offer.

"Death is in the name — Día de los Muertos' — but it's really a celebration of the life we live with each other," Linares said. "It's a celebration of the moments that we're sharing with each other, and it's in that hope we can remember those moments, even pass them on."



Lariat file photo

RECUÉRDAME Participants in the Día de los Muertos festival prepare ofrendas complete with candles, photos and skulls, or calaveras, to remember their loved ones.



James Ellis | Cartoonist

What to Do in Waco: Oct. 30 - Nov. 6

OLIVIA TURNER
Arts & Life Editor

Homecoming is here, and as a result, there's more than enough to do in Waco. When you can only be in one place at a time, the hard part is choosing what to attend. From Pigskin to the pep rally the game, here is the complete guide to this year's homecoming events, with a few extras thrown in.

PIGSKIN REVUE

Oct. 30 - Nov. 1 | 7 p.m. Thursday, 6:30 p.m. & 10:30 p.m. Friday, 7 p.m. Saturday | Waco Hall, 624 Speight Ave. | \$23 - 36 tickets | The night of all nights is finally here, the grand finale to an even grander Baylor tradition — Pigskin Revue! Catch the best acts from 2024's All-University Sing and witness the homecoming court in all their glam and glory. In-person tickets for this event are sold out, but tickets for the streamed version of Saturday's performance can be purchased online up until 5 p.m.

TEN AT TEN: A MASS MEETING EXPERIENCE

Oct. 30 | 10 - 11:30 p.m. | Fountain Mall | Calling all freshmen! Get the scoop on one of Baylor's most famous and sacred pieces of lore — the Immortal Ten and the Eternal Flame. While "somber" is a fitting word to describe the mood of this event, you're guaranteed to leave this annual Baylor ritual feeling a part of something larger than yourself. After, join your classmates to build the bonfire. And hey, even if you're a sophomore, junior or senior, there's no harm in going twice.

HOMECOMING AT THE HURD

Oct. 31 | 8 a.m. - 9 p.m. | Mark and Paula Hurd Welcome Center | If you've got family coming to town, you'll want to head over to the Hurd to get situated before the big events begin. Here, you'll find a schedule of events, campus programs, behind-the-scenes tours of the Hurd, photo ops and giveaways and fun for the whole crew.

DR PEPPER HOUR AT THE BRIC

Oct. 31 | 3-5 p.m. | School of Engineering and Computer Science | Your favorite hour — relocated! RSVP to this homecoming-themed Dr Pepper Hour, where you can still get that delicious soda-ice cream combo, but with a chance to gather with old friends and see the Engineering and Computer Science building.

EXTRAVAGANZA, PEP RALLY AND BONFIRE

Oct. 31 | 6 - 10:30 p.m. | Fountain Mall | Get psyched for the big game at this iconic night-before pep fest. Baylor goes all out here every year, complete with live music courtesy of the Golden Wave Marching Band, speeches from key leaders, float winner announcements and, of course, the bonfire. Carnival games and local food trucks will also be present.

Scan below to find more homecoming events happening this weekend!



A family etched in green & gold

How homecoming has shaped 3 generations of alumnae

KALENA REYNOLDS
Opinion Editor

Terry Terracino rang in her 70th anniversary of being crowned Baylor Homecoming Queen by riding in a glimmering black Corvette in the 2024 homecoming parade. Her daughter, Gretchen McCormack, and granddaughter, Dr. Arden Roeder, stood gleefully watching as they, too, celebrated their legacies at Baylor.

For Terracino, Baylor was not just a college but a community and a passion she passed on to the next generation, with both of her daughters attending Baylor and six of her grandchildren. Terracino originally began her journey at her hometown college, the University of Miami. However, she decided to transfer to Baylor for her junior year after an extensive conversation with her pastor, who had also gone to Baylor.

“That fall, she was asked if she would be willing to be a homecoming nominee,” McCormack said.

Continuing to build on her legacy in her senior year, she graduated in 1956 with a degree in home economics. After graduating,



SMILE & WAVE Baylor’s 1954 homecoming queen, Terry Terracino, hails the crowd from atop a black Corvette in the 2024 parade.

she married her husband, the late Dr. George Ryals, a graduate of Transylvania University, who Roeder said was given the title of Baylor “alumni-by-choice.”

As their family grew, the pair would go on to share their passion for the university, specifically homecoming, with their children and grandchildren.

“I remember from a very young age, every year they went to this thing they called homecoming, and my sister and I would stay with our grandmother,” McCormack said. “As we got a little older, I always heard how much they loved [homecoming], but I didn’t really understand what it was or where it was.”

When McCormack was 14 years old and her sister Jennifer Ryals Ramsey was 11, their parents decided it was time to take a family trip to Waco for their daughters to attend their first homecoming. As the couple shared the sacred love for Waco with their kids through tradition, they began to instill the Sic ‘em way into their children.

“I could remember being a young child and hearing the proverbial ‘What do you want to do when you grow up?’ and my mom would answer on my behalf and say, ‘She wants to go to Baylor and be a home ec major,’” McCormack said.

Even though Baylor was a common conversation topic for the family, it was never an obligation for McCormack, as the love for the university was also passed down.

“When I was old enough to have an answer for myself, it was almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy, and I answered the question when it was posed to me the same way, ‘Well, I’m going to grow up and go to Baylor and be a home economics major,’ which is what I did,” she said.

McCormack said she continued to pass on her mom’s curated passion to her children, and Roeder is now a lecturer in the Communication Department at Baylor.

“Baylor was always this special place to visit,” Roeder said. “So we would come to homecoming, sometimes we would come to football games, we were certainly raised green and gold, the true bleeding green and gold, all the way through our childhood.”

After Roeder graduated from Baylor, she acquired her Ph.D. in organizational communication at the University of Oklahoma. However, when Roeder decided she wanted



A ROYAL LEGACY 1954 Homecoming Queen Terry Terracino (middle) leaves the football field accompanied by Princesses Sondra Issac (left) and Oveta Smith (right).

to teach, she knew Baylor would be her first option, but didn’t know if that was a possibility.

“When I was going through my master’s and doctorate degrees and starting to think about what it would look like to get to teach long-term, of course, my first thought was ‘I would love to be at Baylor,’ but in academia that’s pretty rare,” Roeder said. “Actually, Baylor is really unique. A lot of our students don’t realize that we do have so many alumni as faculty.”

Roeder said that because of the rarity of colleges hiring back their own alumni, being at Baylor is incredibly full circle.

“For all my friends that graduated and left and got jobs and they come back for homecoming and stuff, Baylor is still to them as locked in their memory the way it was when we

were students, like it is for so many people, but that’s my everyday,” Roeder said. “I still have to kind of pinch myself sometimes that I walk to my office on campus and I’m literally teaching in some of the same classrooms where I took classes as a student.”

Surreal moments were not short for Roeder and her family, as her grandmother often tells people about their unique ties to Baylor, from being the 1954 homecoming queen to having a granddaughter teaching at the university.

“I don’t want to discount the trajectory in our family’s history, but that’s one of the great and special things about Baylor is that we do love our own people,” Roeder said. “We love to have Baylor grads and Baylor alumni across campus.”

Homecoming queens bridge past, future

ALEXIA FINNEY
Staff Writer

As a little girl in the stands, Baylor alumna Laura Lalani always watched the Homecoming court with her parents, imagining the adrenaline she would feel on the stage, crowned and celebrated in a pretty dress.

In October 2005, Lalani lived that dream as she stepped forward in a sparkling blue gown, green velvet cape draped over her shoulders, silver tiara and a bouquet of red roses in hand as she accepted the title “Homecoming Queen.”

Since that defining moment in her life, Lalani has become Baylor’s associate director of student affairs and continues to work with students on the homecoming court.

Lalani said she attends Baylor Homecoming every year. This will be her 42nd.

“I know it’s an unusual streak,” Lalani said. “We made it a tradition to come back each year with a group of friends. I eventually moved back to Waco in 2009. That definitely gave me an edge on that streak.”

Over the years, Lalani said she’s seen the court diversify. The greatest shift she noticed, was the inclusion of males in 2021.

“There are more diverse groups, more diverse types of people that may not have participated in it just 15, 20 years ago,” Lalani said.

In addition, Lalani said the homecoming court candidates continue to impress judges, achieving Baylor’s interview criteria: “scholarship, philanthropy, spiritual commitment and poise.”

“I’ve definitely seen a wide canvas of submissions every year, [like] people that maybe have started their own projects that have impacted the community,” Lalani said. “It could be a nonprofit or starting a business.”

Reflecting on her own time as queen, Lalani said she cherished her time in the spotlight. Although her time has passed, she said her experience made her a better leader and gave her greater confidence.

“To be able to walk out into the middle of the field was just spectacular, to see all the fans,” Lalani said. “There were always these groups of little girls that were so excited, and they wanted a picture with you.”

One of those little girls could have been 2019 Homecoming Queen Kaylin Clemons. Similar to Lalani, Clemons’ journey to the homecoming court started before she set foot on campus.

“I determined it was going to be Baylor in the fourth grade, and it didn’t change



IF THE CROWN FITS Lalani beams as she is named the 2005 homecoming queen.

since,” Clemons said. “At my high school, they would call me ‘that Baylor girl.’”

As a kid, Clemons said she found herself watching Baylor YouTube videos, dreaming of the day that she would walk around Penland and Fountain Mall.

“I definitely knew some of the larger traditions when I was little,” she said. “I knew there was a homecoming parade, and it was the biggest parade ever.”

After college, Clemons moved to Frisco, where she began work as a management consultant. She said during her transition to post-grad, Baylor remained central to her identity.

“Even after I moved to Frisco and built a life here, it’s one of those things that naturally comes up,” Clemons said. “Getting to open the door to those conversations sheds light on deeper things, like values and

time spent.”

Since her crowning in 2019, Clemons said she continues to stay plugged in at Baylor, attending regular events and reunions.

“I’m there for every home football game, every home basketball game and every homecoming,” Clemons said. “I’m going down this Thursday, and I’ll be there all weekend.”

Like Lalani and the women who came before her, Clemons sees homecoming not just as a weekend of celebration, but as a living, evolving tradition that showcases pride and binds Baylor women and the Waco community.

“It’s this weird, beautiful moment where you’re fully present and realize the active part of history you’re making,” Clemons said.



Add these nostalgic anthems to your homecoming playlist

KALENA REYNOLDS
Opinion Editor

Soon city streets will be decorated with golden lights and families will gather around bushels of green and gold. Whether you’re a die-hard football fan or prefer a more casual visit to the bonfire with friends, it’s essential to set a musical tone for your weekend. Here are five songs to add to your homecoming playlist.

“THERE SHE GOES” BY THE LA’S

“There She Goes” is your fun older cousin who you see once a year and is really into David Fincher films. You’re not really sure how they make money or where they live, but man, they are cool. With “There She Goes” at the beginning of your homecoming playlist, you’ll set the tone off right. This ‘90s hit, featuring a catchy chorus and an unforgettable resonating guitar riff, suits the homecoming vibes.

“BORN TO RUN” BY BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

There are a few places where Bruce Springsteen’s music lives best — your dad’s playlist, ‘90s rom-com ending scenes and nostalgic moments with friends ... oh, and Baylor Homecoming. “Born To Run” defies generations and represents the American dream as driving rhythm and syncopated guitar riffs.

For the full list, scan the QR code!

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Football, friends & FOMO

Why alumni return for homecoming

O'CONNOR DANIEL
Reporter

For many Baylor alumni, homecoming is more than just a fun weekend, but rather a return to the community, traditions and people that formed their college years. And for some, it's also a cure for something familiar to most post-grads: the fear of missing out.

"It allows me to come back and reconnect with all the people I love most and honor the school that gave me the most wonderful friends, community and most amazing four years," said Madeline Alfonso ('25) who's returning for her first homecoming as an alumna. "It is such a gift. There's no place like home."

Since graduating, Alfonso has moved to Washington, D.C., where the pace of life and cultural differences have made her even more grateful for her time in Waco. She said it's not just the events or the school she misses, it's the people.

"I miss always having so many people who are strong in their faith and point me to truth," Alfonso said. "Having like-minded people around you is such a gift."

Now living out of state, she said homecoming helps ease the sting of post-grad distance, at least temporarily.

"I'm reunited with all the people that know and love me best again," Alfonso said. "However, it's hard when they all go back home with each other, and I'm leaving alone."

Still, she returns for the memories — and the Southern hospitality.

"At a place like Baylor and Waco, professors invite you into their homes for dinner," Alfonso said. "Local restaurant owners know you by name. Even the gas station clerk at the Valero talks to you like you've known each other forever."

She describes Southern hospitality as "a big warm hug."

"People from the South are welcoming and generous," Alfonso said. "They invite people into their homes and make them feel as though they're part of the family."

For Kristi Lake Fuller, homecoming has only become more meaningful with time. A 1995 graduate who also earned her master's from Baylor in 1996, Fuller now returns to campus not just as an alumna, but as a mom.

She says her favorite homecoming traditions



FAMILY FUN The Fullers attend a football game at McLane Stadium. Homecoming has always been a multigenerational tradition for their family.

are Pigskin and the football game, but the real joy comes from watching her kids carry on the legacy she once lived.

"I love that it wasn't forced and they made these decisions on their own," Fuller said. "They now understand my deep love for Baylor and my life at Baylor."

Her own homecoming memories go back to schedules packed full of campus spirit.

"It was always a full weekend starting with Pigskin, then to the bonfire on Friday night, getting up early for the parade and then the football game, ending with the homecoming dance on the bridge," she said.

Watching her kids thrive at Baylor and experience the same traditions she once did, performing in Pigskin, is especially meaningful for Fuller, who started dating her now-husband during homecoming weekend.

"It is a special connection that I share with my dad, brothers, husband and now kids and hopefully grandkids."



FOOTBALL REUNION A younger generation of Fullers pose with their grandparents during a Baylor football game.

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THEY SEE ME STROLLING Members of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity perform during Baylor's Stroll-Off Homecoming event on Oct. 25, 2024.

Phi Beta Sigma, NPHC to host ‘high-energy’ stroll-off

LEXIE RODENBAUGH
Arts & Life Writer

In the midst of homecoming festivities, the Nu Zeta chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. and the National Pan-Hellenic Council are bringing a stroll-off to campus on Friday from 7-9 p.m. at the SUB.

Strolling is a high-energy tradition within historically Black fraternities and sororities. It combines synchronized dance, steps and movements performed in unison to music. Each organization uses its own signature style, chants and formations to showcase pride, unity and creativity, according to Pflugerville senior Damo Kouakou, member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

At the stroll-off, the organizations will be judged on five different categories: synchronization, originality, engagement, creativity and how well they represent their organization's traditions. The Homecoming Stroll-Off is both a showcase of culture and a celebration of campus unity, bringing together the community to enjoy the artistry and energy of Greek life, Kouakou said.

"I am super excited that they will be doing a stroll off this weekend," Newport Beach, Calif., sophomore Kendall Stake said. "I feel like it is a super cool tradition that they have. I will definitely be attending."

Although strolling has just recently started going viral on TikTok, the history and tradition of this dance is rich and deep for the organizations.

"The Homecoming Stroll-Off has become one of Nu Zeta's signature traditions, breaking attendance records and awarding prizes to the top three organizations, all while showcasing the culture of the Divine Nine," Kouakou said. "This year's event is especially meaningful as we celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Nu Zeta Chapter's Charter Day, honoring our legacy of excellence and service at Baylor. Also, this year it's going to be Halloween-themed."

Six National Pan-Hellenic Council organizations will be taking the stage to participate in the event, including Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. In addition, Alpha Kappa Delta Phi Sorority, Inc. will also perform.

With so many events to attend during the homecoming weekend, it can be hard to decide which ones to spend time at. Kouakou said students should come to the event because it is one of the most high-energy and exciting events Baylor offers.

"It's a chance to see the creativity, unity and pride of Baylor's Divine Nine organizations through music, dance and performance," Kouakou said. "Beyond the entertainment, the stroll off brings the campus community together, offers opportunities to support peers and celebrates both tradition and culture in a way that's fun, engaging and unforgettable."

Top Sing acts return to Waco Hall for Pigskin

ALEXANDRA BREWER
Arts & Life Intern

School spirit is set to take over Waco Hall this week as Pigskin Revue returns as part of Baylor's homecoming festivities. The curtain rises Thursday for the three-day production, which reprises the top-scoring acts from last spring's All-University Sing.

The long-running tradition combines Broadway-style performances with a Baylor twist. Each act is completely student-produced, from choreography to costumes and sets — often taking months of late-night rehearsals to perfect. Additionally, Pigskin is a great recruitment tool for sororities and fraternities to market themselves to potential new members.

"It really helps you put in perspective your freshman year when you're watching it, like 'OK, this is what I get to do for the next four years, and how fun is that?'" Rockwall junior and Tri Delta Sing chair Chaney Moore said.

All-University Sing is a campus-wide musical competition held every spring. The student organizations featured in Pigskin must earn their spot, where they perform their acts for an alumni-filled Waco Hall during homecoming.

"We honestly try not to do too many changes because for the people that are in Sing that are now in Pigskin, they already know the dance," Robinson senior and Zeta Tau Alpha Sing chair Brinley Darling said.

In the spring, Chi Omega took first place, followed by Alpha Tau Omega in second and Delta Delta Delta in third. Additionally, Kappa Kappa Gamma, Kappa Omega Tau, Pi Phi Chi and Zeta Tau Alpha were invited to perform based on their scores.

Darling mentioned that rehearsals look different as the groups adjust to new members joining the act and navigate hectic fall schedules.

"The commitments you have to do during homecoming in the fall are very different from what you would have in the spring," Darling said.

Similarly, Moore said it was an adjustment to incorporate new faces into Tri Delta's routine.

"Over half of our act for Pigskin is our new sophomore class, so it's their first time participating," Moore said.

Despite the long hours of rehearsals and busy schedules, both Sing chairs said that the payoff is worth it when the curtains rise.



REPRISE In 2025, Chi Omega took home first place for their act, "Back on Track."

"Just hearing your name announced that we had an invitation to Pigskin was the craziest thing ever," Darling said. We were just so excited so we had all this hard work pay off."

For students, alumni and faculty alike, Pigskin is more than just entertainment — it's a key component of Baylor Homecoming festivities. The tradition continues to bring the university community together.

"I just have a lot of pride with it this year because I was a Sing chair for the act in the spring," Moore said. "Getting to follow it and keep those memories going and keep going strong with the act this fall has been really special as well."

Pigskin performances are scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday, 6:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Friday and 7 p.m. Saturday. In-person tickets are sold out, but livestream tickets are available for the Saturday night show here. Baylor's clear-bag policy will be enforced, and security screenings will take place at entry.

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Meet the artist behind Baylor’s Sing, Pigskin backdrops

O’CONNOR DANIEL
Reporter

As Baylor prepares for homecoming and Pigskin Revue returns to Waco Hall, Greg Rogers’ artistry will once again take center stage — quietly, from behind the scenes.

But for Rogers, the hours spent painting each backdrop aren’t just about the artwork, but about the relationships he builds with the students.

“The painting is fine,” Rogers said. “But the best part is the conversations.”

Those conversations unfold over long, paint-splattered hours — sophomores who return as seniors, students balancing stress with excitement and countless questions about faith and purpose.

“We end up talking about some pretty deep topics,” he said. “The paradoxes of Christianity, what’s going on in their lives and how to put Christ at the center of it.”

This fall, Rogers’ work will be featured once again as students perform their Sing acts in Pigskin, a long-standing Baylor tradition. And looking ahead to spring, he’s already preparing to paint 16 out of 20 backdrops for next year’s All-University Sing, making this weekend’s performances a preview of what’s to come.

Rogers spent nearly three decades working in healthcare before discovering an artistic talent he didn’t know he had. His journey into scenic painting began when he sought to connect with his sons at Trinity Christian Academy in Dallas.

“One was in art class, so I started doing the same sketches,” he said. “The other was in drama, and like every parent, I showed up on set build day.”

That one Saturday snowballed. Rogers began drawing and building sets for school productions and churches. Eventually, he left his healthcare career to pursue art full-time.

“It was one of those ‘God gave you a talent and you didn’t know’ moments,” he said.

Rogers started painting Baylor Sing backdrops in 2019 after his son joined Phi Kappa Chi. His first project was the backdrop for their act, “So Tied Up”— a design that spilled onto the stage with real cornrows and immersive visuals.

“It was really special to see what they did with the message,” he said. “The whole thing came alive.”

Each November, Rogers said he temporarily moves to Waco for peak production. Once the banners are sketched and blocked, he raises them on a stage in Dallas, five feet at a time, like a typewriter, to add layers of depth.

“When you do that, you’ll see floors fall down, buildings separate,” he said. “It becomes a scene.”

In Chi Omega’s 2022 act, “Taken for Granite,” Rogers said the effect made it feel like the portico was standing up, facing the audience.

“That was one of the first times I realized I was seeing in 3D before I even started,” he said.

Even the backdrops that didn’t reach an audience, like a Phi Kappa Chi design from

2020, remain special to him.

“You felt like you could open the gate and walk into a world that went on for miles,” Rogers said, describing the scene that included a chain-link fence and a bridge.

For Rogers, there’s no better moment than the audience’s first reaction when the curtain opens.

“What I tell students we’re aiming for is to hear an audible sound — that ‘ah’ from the crowd when they see it for the first time,” he said.

Though the quality of his work has led many to say it belongs in a gallery, Rogers never paints with permanence in mind. His banners are temporary by design, each one on display for just a couple of weeks before disappearing behind the curtain again.

“The real magic of it isn’t in the art exhibit at all,” Rogers said. “It was really the time spent leading up to it. Because what we do together — me and the students — outshines any of the art.”

Alpha Chi Omega took home the Best Backdrop award for their Sing performance in the spring, and McKinney senior and Chapter President Ella Schmidt said the recognition was all the more meaningful because of the collaboration with Rogers.

“We love working with Greg Rogers to make our ideas come to reality,” Schmidt said. “The most rewarding part was when the backdrop was done being painted and the Sing team saw it completed for the first time. It was surreal.”

Their act, themed around the French Revolution, featured a hand-painted



Photo courtesy of Greg Rogers

WAITING IN THE WINGS Greg Rogers works on painting one of the many backdrops ahead of Baylor’s upcoming Sing season and has done so since 2019.

Versailles palace backdrop that anchored their storytelling.

“With our theme, we knew it had to be Versailles to really convey our story,” Schmidt said. “Seeing the backdrop again brings us back to Sing and all of the memories and hard work that go into each act.”

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