

WELCOME BACK



SQUAD GOALS President Linda Livingstone poses with the girls of Alpha Phi for Move2BU.
Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor



PLAY IT BACK DJ Lagway has been named Baylor's starting quarterback for the 2026-2027 season.
Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics

Football PREVIEW

B Section

Despite triple-digit heat, Move2BU volunteers go the extra mile

ABBY RATHBURN
Staff Writer

TRIPP HENDERSON
Staff Writer

Sweat dripped down faces, shouts of encouragement echoed across campus and water bottles became essential as student volunteers helped incoming students move into their new homes Thursday.

A heat advisory and temperatures well above 100 degrees did little to deter students from volunteering with Move2BU, Baylor's annual move-in program that brings student organizations and community members together to help new students settle into campus life. As cars pull up, volunteers unload them quickly — often in less than a minute — and deliver the belongings to the students' new room.

Goldthwaite senior Avery Graves, Kappa Alpha Theta president, said volunteering gives students the opportunity to make the stressful process of moving to college a little easier.

"I just love getting to help the freshmen because I know move-in was kind of stressful for me, and just getting to take the burden off of them and make it more fun for them is really fun," Graves said.

President Linda Livingstone, who was participating in her 10th Move2BU, thanked the volunteers for arriving early to help welcome the incoming class.

"I am so proud of our students and faculty and staff that help out," Livingstone said. "They are troopers, and they work hard. ... They're just having a great time welcoming."

For incoming students, that welcome can make the transition to college feel less overwhelming.

Calabasas, California, freshman Anna Park said older students she connected with before arriving on campus have already helped her adjust to life in Waco. "They've been pitching in everything, like a mattress topper, rides to church," Park said. "They've just been so awesome, and it's starting to feel like home."

Still, leaving home for college can bring a mix of excitement and uncertainty.

Corsicana freshman Landon Murillo said leaving his family and home church has been difficult, but his faith has helped him approach the transition.

"I'm always thinking about my family and my home church as well," Murillo said. "It just had such an impact on my life, so I know saying goodbye is really hard, but I know that if it's this hard, then it had a great impact on my life."

Murillo isn't alone in these feelings. Sharon Shalwani, a parent from Coppell, said she has gone through many mixed emotions about moving her daughter into college.

"We've been preparing for this day since her junior year, so we're really excited," said Shalwani. "It was her top choice and her only choice, so we're very happy to come to Baylor, but I'm also kind of nervous to let go, but we gotta do it."

To ease the minds of these new families, Livingstone provided some words of encouragement.

"Take full advantage of the college

experience and ... enjoy being here," Livingstone said. "Make the most of every minute you can."

According to the Baylor website, Welcome Week gives new student opportunities to build friendships by participating in events that connect them to the Baylor and Waco community.

Houston sophomore Sophia Chiang, a New Student Programs volunteer, advised students to stay open-minded this week.

"Welcome Week is such a great time and place to explore and be who you are and also find yourself and find other people who are like-minded," Chiang said.

Chiang said her own move-in experience showed her how quickly

Baylor's community could make a new student feel at home.

Irving senior Jayden Samuel, an Honors Residential College volunteer, said that sense of community is what motivates him to help.

"There's a lot of people walking in that are not from Waco or didn't grow up in a personal community, so I see it as our gift to be able to help with some of this," Samuel said.



MOVIN' UP Regan Holloway and Amarie Lopez welcome new students for Move2BU.

Mim Robbins | Photographer

New dean at Harrington sees faith as foundation for Baylor’s future nurses

HANNAH WEBB
News Editor

For Dean Tanya Sudia, she cannot remember an “aha” moment when she decided to become a nurse. Instead, she said, nursing has always felt like a calling — one rooted in serving others.

Now, as the new dean of Baylor University’s Louise Herrington School of Nursing, Sudia hopes to instill that same sense of calling in the next generation of nurses.

“I also don’t know any moment in time when I didn’t think of myself as wanting to be a nurse,” Sudia said. “This has been a lifelong passion.”

Sudia began her role June 1, returning to Baylor after previously serving as the School of Nursing’s research dean from 2014-2020 before leaving to lead nursing programs at other universities. During her time as research dean, Sudia developed policies and processes to strengthen research and faculty mentorship, according to a January announcement about her appointment.

Her return comes as the school prepares students for a health care industry increasingly shaped by new technology, including artificial intelligence. But while the tools nurses use may change, Sudia said Baylor’s nursing education will not.

“We believe nursing is a calling,” Sudia said. “We believe that our nursing students, our nurses, our alums, we prepare them to be the hands and feet of Christ.”

For Sudia, that means Baylor nurses must be prepared to do more than provide technically proficient care. They must also be prepared to see patients as people and approach them with compassion.

Students are taught that their faith can be part of their practice. She said students are encouraged to pray for patients, pray with them or pray for colleagues and other members of the



Photo courtesy of Whitney Cortner

CHRIST-CENTERED APPROACH Dr. Tanya Sudia began serving as The Louise Herrington School of Nursing’s dean June 1.

healthcare team.

That Christ-centered approach, Sudia said, sets Baylor’s nursing program apart as technology continues to reshape the profession.

The Baylor nursing programs differs from most programs the school offers in that students begin their undergraduate degree in Waco before moving to the Dallas campus. Freshmen and sophomores spend their first two years in Waco before moving to Dallas for their junior and senior years, where Sudia said efforts aim to match the resources and support available on Baylor’s main campus.

“We have student services in Dallas, a chaplain in Dallas and try to mimic as much as what’s on the main campus there in terms of support services right there for our students,” she said.

The Dallas campus is preparing to open a new simulation center, giving nursing students expanded opportunities to practice clinical skills with new technology before caring for patients in real clinical settings.

Sudia said artificial intelligence can similarly enhance nursing practice, but it should remain a tool, not a replacement for human care.

“We like to say high technology, high touch,” Sudia said.

The phrase captures the balance Sudia hopes to maintain: nurses who are equipped to work with increasingly sophisticated technology while never losing the personal connection at

the center of their profession.

That philosophy extends beyond the classroom.

The School of Nursing’s motto — “learn, lead, serve” — reflects what Sudia sees as its larger purpose. Students are expected not only to master the science of nursing and develop as leaders but also to serve others through mission opportunities around the world.

“We’re here to invest in students,” Sudia said. “We’re here for them to learn, to serve.”

Interim Provost Lee Nordt said in a statement that Sudia’s commitment to Baylor’s Christian mission will be an important part of her leadership.

“She has a commitment to advancing nursing education and research and a dedication to Baylor’s Christian mission are invaluable as LHSON continues preparing nurses who are equipped to serve patients with excellence, compassion and integrity,” Nordt said. “We appreciate the leadership and vision she brings to the School and the critical role LHSON plays in addressing healthcare needs across our state and nation.”

For Sudia, that preparation begins with mentorship. After years of teaching, research and nursing leadership, she said one of her favorite things is helping students and faculty grow in their own work.

“I think my passion now is really mentoring other faculty and our students and others in teaching, research and scholarship,” Sudia said.

As she begins her first year as dean, Sudia is looking toward the future of nursing without losing sight of what she believes should remain at its center.

“When [students] leave us, they’re ready for practice, but they also bring that additional component of caring and compassion in a Christ-centered focus,” she said.

BSM OPENING



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

FOR THE CAMPUS President Linda Livingstone joins members of Texas Baptists and BSM for a ribbon cutting ceremony Wednesday morning at the new Baptist Student Ministries building.

KOKERNOT



Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

KOKER-YES Baylor University completed its renovation of Kokernot Hall, wrapping up a decade long refurbishment plan for dormitories on campus.

WELCOME WEEK



Mim Robbins | Photographer

NEW BEARS ON THE BLOCK Students and family gather in the Mark and Paula Hurd Welcome Center for Welcome Week festivities Wednesday evening.

What to know about ‘Duration of Status’ rule change

GISELLE LEE
Staff Writer

As Baylor international students return to Waco for the fall semester, they will face new regulations after the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the termination of “Duration of Status” (D/S), effective as early as Sept. 15 this year.

The final rule, published by DHS on Aug. 17, is the latest policy update, intended to provide “additional protections and oversight of these non-immigrant categories” and allow DHS to “better evaluate whether these non-immigrants are maintaining status while temporarily in the United States.”

Dr. Mark Bryant, Director of

International Student and Scholar Services at Baylor, noted in an email that while the new policy does not change the F-1/K-1 visa process, it will “restrict what F-1 and J-1 students and scholars are allowed to do once in the US,” which may vary on a case-by-case basis.

“[The restrictions] include the length of stay in the U.S. and academic program changes,” Bryant said. “The impact of the new regulations will affect some more than others depending on how long it takes to complete the academic degree and whether the student faces any delays or wants to make any changes.”

According to the DHS, the main change is shifting the admission period from D/S to an “admission for

a fixed time period” — predominantly four years — along with additional changes to admission and extension requirements.

Megha Bobba, a sophomore from Hyderabad, India, said the new restrictions could create more complications for international students.

“These changes could make planning our education and future careers more difficult because we have to be more careful about maintaining our status and meeting deadlines,” Bobba said. “Even small changes in immigration rules can have a major impact on our education and future plans.”

Bobba said she learned about the updated rules through her own research and information

provided by the Baylor ISSS Office, which she said has been “helpful” in providing information and guidance; however, it lacks a case-by-case breakdown.

“I understand the general changes, but I still feel there is some uncertainty about how they could affect my individual situation,” Bobba said. “Having timely, clear and easily accessible information from the university, as well as more specific guidance, would help students feel better prepared.”

In light of the rule change, the ISSS Office has a dedicated webpage with an FAQ related to the changes and has held an online training course for students. Bryant said it will host an in-person training on Aug. 21, and release an online training module

so students can learn more about the changes.

Bryant recommended that international students’ “best actions” are to ensure they make continual progress toward their degree, that their documents reflect the correct program end date and that they check with the ISSS Office with any questions.

“If students need to extend their program end date, they should begin that process with the Baylor ISSS office now,” Bryant said. “International students should also always ask for assistance from a Baylor ISSS Staff member if they have questions. Students should not make decisions based on something a friend said or what they may have read online.”

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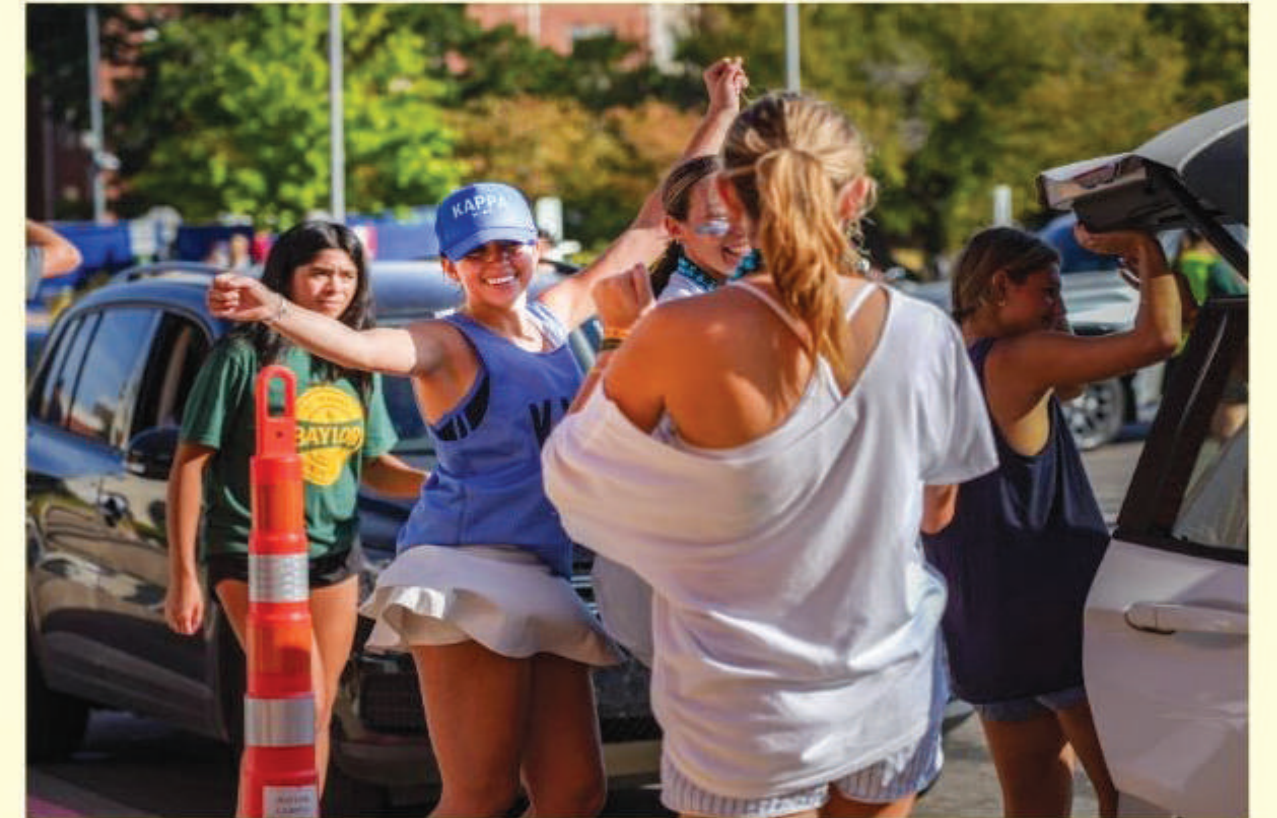
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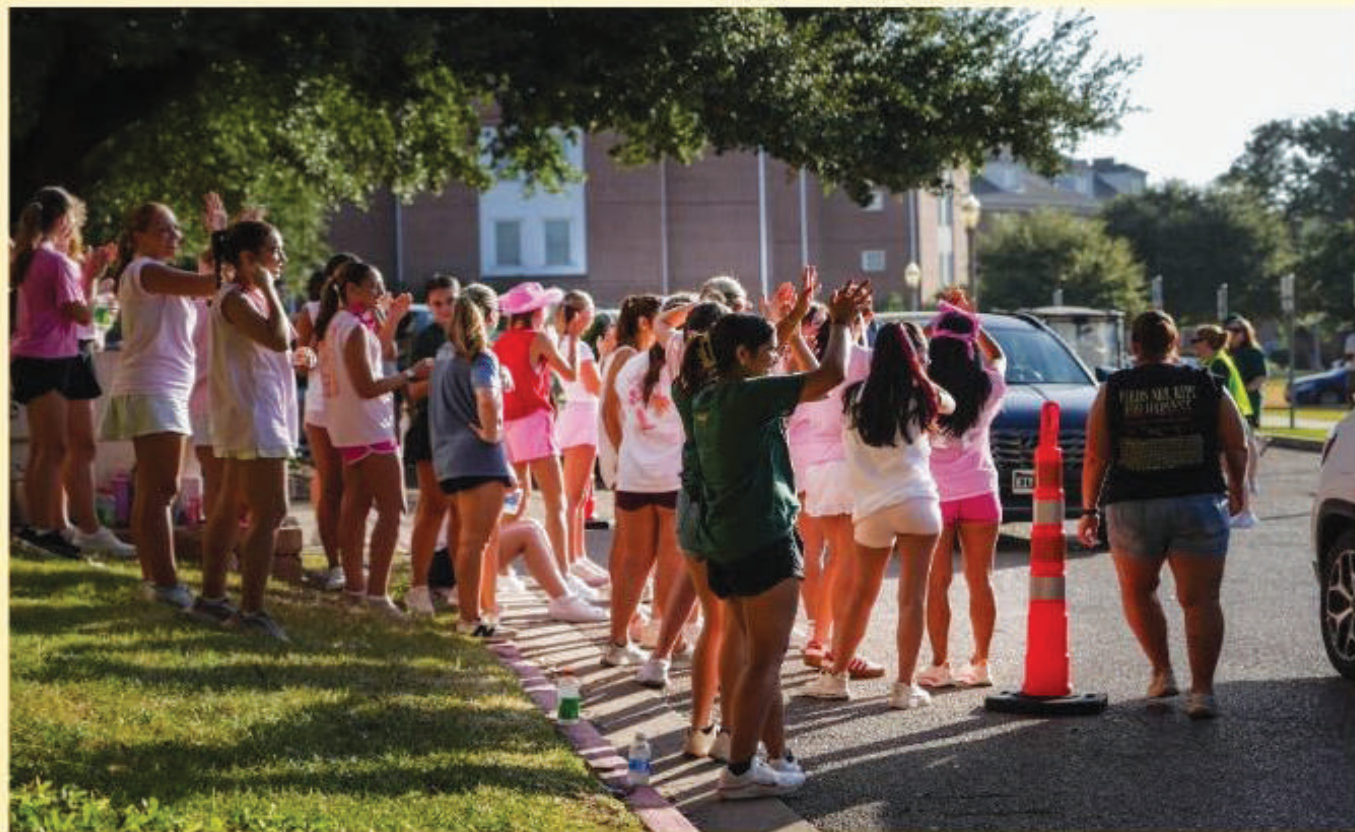
PRESIDENTIAL WELCOME President Linda Livingstone chats with residence faculty at South Russell Hall Thursday morning for Move2BU.



HELPING HANDS Baylor volunteers help carry bags and furniture into Texana House Thursday morning for Move2BU.



SHARING THE FUN Kappa Kappa Gamma films for social media during Move2BU outside of Collins Residence Hall Thursday morning.



UNPACKING PINK Alpha Phi welcomes new Baylor students at South Russell Hall during Move2BU Thursday morning.



HEAVY LIFTING Members of Phi Kappa Chi carry luggage into Martin Hall for Move2BU Thursday morning.

Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

Mim Robbins | Photographer



GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

We want to hear it. Send us your thoughts: Lariat-Letters@baylor.edu

Baylor, we’re back: Meet The Lariat’s Editorial Board

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Welcome back to campus, Bears. We are so glad you are here. Whether today is your first day at Baylor or you’ve done this a few times, we hope your first day of classes goes well.

To begin the year, we want to explain who is behind the editorials you see every week. In TLDR fashion, we are students writing for the students.

The Baylor Lariat’s editorial board is made up of a group of Lariat editors who meet each week to discuss the issues, events and conversations shaping the Baylor community and beyond.

Whether we’re tackling a serious issue facing Baylor or weighing in on something more lighthearted, we aim to reach a position together. Bearing The Editorial Board byline reflects the collective opinion of the board’s members, which may not be the personal beliefs of the individual editor who writes it. While we may not always agree when we walk into our weekly meetings, the opinions we publish are ones we have discussed, challenged and ultimately agreed to put our name behind as a collective.

The opinions expressed in an editorial are also separate from The Lariat’s news coverage, which is reported independently and strives to present information fairly and accurately.

Before we start telling you what we think, we thought you should know a little about who we are. So, meet the 2026-27 Lariat editorial board.

KALENA REYNOLDS Editor-in-Chief

While there are many unique aspects to Waco living, one is the accessibility to live music. From jazz to hip-hop, the town has secretly been flourishing throughout the years with

different musicians and music venues. The Backyard Bar Stage and Grill is a must for seeing bigger artists. If you’re looking for something more low-key than Texas Music Cafe, The Will and Common Grounds are all good options.

SOPHIA MONSON Opinion Editor

Even though I spent my whole life in the United States, moving from Seattle to Waco had me continually experiencing culture shock. I’d never seen an 8-lane highway, let alone seen a real-life cowboy. Finding my place at Baylor took time, but it helped most to become close friends with my roommate and join an organization where I felt at home.

To those in a similar boat, be patient as you adjust to the newness of college life and the awkwardness of change. And, to answer the most asked questions: yes, I love Buc-ee’s, and no, I don’t enjoy the heat.

HANNAH WEBB News Editor

One thing about me is I love a “side quest.” Some of the best memories I have made have been with my friends walking around campus or driving to Buc-ee’s at 2 a.m. While it’s probably not the best advice, academics isn’t always the priority. Make an effort to close the Canvas tab every once and a while and say “yes” to an adventure. If you actually want to make college the best four years of your life, I can assure you that won’t be accomplished without spending time in community.

ELLIOTT NACE Asst. News Editor

I love collecting things and doing lots of one-off activities. Above all else, having that odd thing you do makes for a great conversation starter. Whether it be a sport on a small team or a tradition you and your friends



Sarah Matteck | Cartoonist

take very seriously, involve yourself in something that makes you tastefully niche. For now, the goal is to teach the rest of the board how to play this card game called Cabo without any hard feelings, but that might be impossible.

ARDEN BERRY Arts & Life Editor

I have a major sweet tooth, especially when it comes to chocolate. As much as I love Memo cookies (especially when they have M&M’s), there are plenty of great treats off campus as well. For cake-lovers, Simply Delicious Bakery has cupcakes that are indeed simply delicious. Waco also has some great cold treats; with Waco originals like Heritage Creamery, Katie’s Frozen Custard and Health Camp.

ADDISON GERNENZ Copy Editor

Physical media has always been an important part of my life, and it has stayed that way throughout my time at Baylor. I’ve made some of my best friends through late-night movie nights — whether we’re driving 12 minutes down the road for a 10 p.m. showing of the new Spider-Man at the AMC or cramming into one of our dorm rooms to watch the entirety of “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy — or because we’ve read the same book and have similar feelings about it. Fabled Bookshop & Cafe is a favorite of mine, and I would encourage students to take advantage of the Waco Public Library.

JACOB STOWERS Digital Content Producer

Not all study spots are built the same, and ultimately, finding the right study spot comes down to a whole lot of trial and error. If you prefer a coffee shop, I’d recommend Pinewood Coffee or For Keeps. They both have excellent vibes and reasonably priced coffee.

If you are a quiet studier, I recommend taking a trip across campus to the beautiful Armstrong Browning Library, where you can indeed hear a pin drop. Just remember to prioritize your mental health and friends to prevent burnout. To all new or returning Bears, have a great semester.

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Packed fall concert schedule offers ‘something for everyone’

ARDEN BERRY

Arts & Life Editor

From the familiar frequencies of Foster Pavilion to the bumping beats of the new Baylor Backyard Live series, the fall semester is packed with concerts.

With genres ranging from Old Dominion's country to Mt. Joy's indie rock, Jason Cook, vice president of marketing and communications, said this fall concert schedule has something for everyone.

"Music is so personal, so subjective that there may be an artist that's not on your playlist regularly, but we still want to get artists in our facilities where you can have a great time and a great experience," Cook said.

OLD DOMINION

For students and their visiting family, Old Dominion will offer A-list country music this Family Weekend on Sept. 18 at Foster Pavilion. Rising country artist McCoy Moore will open the show.

Cook said Old Dominion is a "big coup" for Baylor and Waco overall.

"Old Dominion is a great example of Waco now being on the map for A-list country entertainers because Old Dominion had a streak," Cook said. "They are big time in Nashville, they're big time around the country."

CARTER FAITH

Despite the cancellation of her last trip to Waco as opener for Post Malone and Jelly Roll, country artist Carter Faith is coming to Pi Beta Phi's Howdy at the Hurd on Sept. 25.

Howdy starts at 7 p.m. The free concert will start at 8:30 p.m. at the stage on Dutton Avenue outside the Mark and Paula Hurd Welcome Center.

Faith's debut album, "Cherry Valley," was a finalist for the Academy of Country Music Awards album of the year, an accomplishment Cook said is "practically unheard of."

"I still don't know how we got her for Howdy at the Hurd," Cook said. "She's an incredible writer, but an incredible musician as well."

Cook said Howdy is a key part in welcoming incoming students to Texas, something Faith's country background will reflect.

"She's just going to be perfect for that Howdy environment," Cook said. "And we're excited

to have a female country headliner on our campus too."

Amarillo senior Taylor Held, vice president of community relations for Pi Beta Phi, said the artist announcement stirred a lot of excitement.

"It means that Howdy is pretty close to coming," Held said. "And so we've gotten a lot of really positive feedback and a lot of people are really excited, which makes us even more excited."

BAYLOR BACKYARD LIVE

Football and free live music will come together to bring a variety of beats across the six home games this season. Each artist will start about 1 hour and 45 minutes before kickoff outside McLane Stadium at Touchdown Alley.

Baylor Backyard Live is part of Vice President and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics Doug McNamee's Fan First Era.

"Our university marketing team has been working with the athletics marketing team hand-in-hand on this whole effort for this upcoming football season," Cook said. "When we started looking at tailgating, what else could we bring to the tailgating environment to bring some excitement together?"

Baylor had already experimented with combining the concert and tailgate experience last September, when the Graham St. Clair Band, made up of Baylor alumni, played before the Big 12 Conference Fall Tour.

"It brought some energy to the tailgating environment," Cook said. "What if we did a concert every game? And the conversation just kept growing,"

Cook said each week will bring a new kind of artist, from Waco band Suede's mix of R&B, funk, rock and jazz music coming Sept. 12, to

Wynn Williams' neotraditional country music coming Oct. 17.

Each artist was strategically placed. For example, The Members Only Band will play Sept. 19 during Family Weekend.

"I'm really excited for one, Members Only Band, which is an 80s band," Cook said. "Most of our parents of our current students grew up in the 80s."

For Baylor's first Big 12 game of the season on Sept. 26, Pat Green will take the stage.

"We wanted a signature artist, a name artist that people would be familiar with to kick off the Big 12 schedule with Colorado," Cook said. "Being from Waco, he's a name that everyone knows in the Texas country scene."

In a homecoming of their own, Graham St. Clair Band will return to Touchdown Alley for the homecoming game on Nov. 7.

"We're excited for homecoming to be able to bring back Graham St. Clair Band," Cook said. "I mean, it's a great story. Here's alums who are in the music business trying to make a run at it in country-folk-Americana music."

Baylor Backyard Live will conclude its inaugural season with The Sloppy Joe Band's classic rock 'n' roll on Nov. 21.

"Last game of the season is right before Thanksgiving, the Texas Tech game," Cook said. "There's going to be a lot of families in town. Sloppy Joe Band has been around for 30

years ... trying to match the rhythm of the season."

Overall, Cook said that working with Baylor Athletics to plan Baylor Backyard Live is exciting.

"It's just another great example of a partnership, and really how live music can bring fans together, but it also

brings organizations to work together as well," Cook said.

BRAXTON KEITH

Rising country artist Braxton Keith is riding into Foster Pavilion on Oct. 2.

Following Hudson Westbrook's concert in April, Steve Richo, a co-founder of Noise New Media, said Keith was an obvious choice.

"I think that that was just great timing to bring him in there to build upon the great young country music base we built with Hudson Westbrook," Richo said.

MT. JOY

Baylor and Magnolia will team up to host Mt. Joy and Ax and the Hatchetmen at the Silobration kickoff concert at 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 22 at Foster Pavilion.

Cook said Mt. Joy's indie rock music stands apart from Foster Pavilion's previous artists.

"We've done a lot of work so far with our entertainment program through the three C's, which is a Christian country and comedy," Cook said. "So this whole indie, adult, alternative genre is different for us."

Deer Park junior Jolie Bridy said she enjoys Mt. Joy's indie genre.

"They have a very easy-to-listen-to, good vibes kind of music," Bridy said. "I'm always hopping around different genres and stuff, but every time they do come on, I am very pleased with the songs."

Silobration will continue with three concerts Oct. 23-25 at the Silos.

"This year's concert lineup offers something for everyone, from the nostalgic sound of The Fray on Friday night at the Silos, to Texas-born Americana artist Dylan Gossett on Saturday night, to a singer-songwriter style Sunday morning concert experience with Cory Asbury," Dawn Hall, director of brand experience at Magnolia, said in an email sent to The Lariat. "Mt. Joy brings a different energy to the lineup with their upbeat, crowd-connecting sound, making them the perfect way to launch the weekend and get the celebration started."

Tickets are currently available at the Baylor ticket website for Old Dominion, Braxton Keith and Mt. Joy. Tickets are also available for Third Day and La Fiera de Ojinaga and Los Pescadores del Río Conchos concerts in the spring.

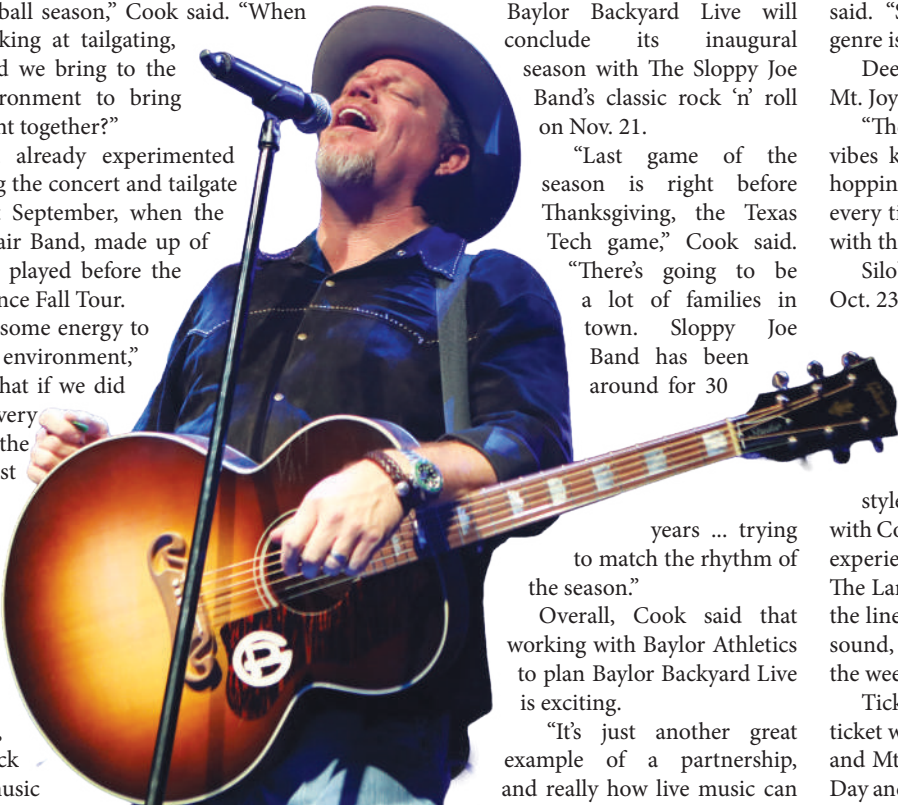
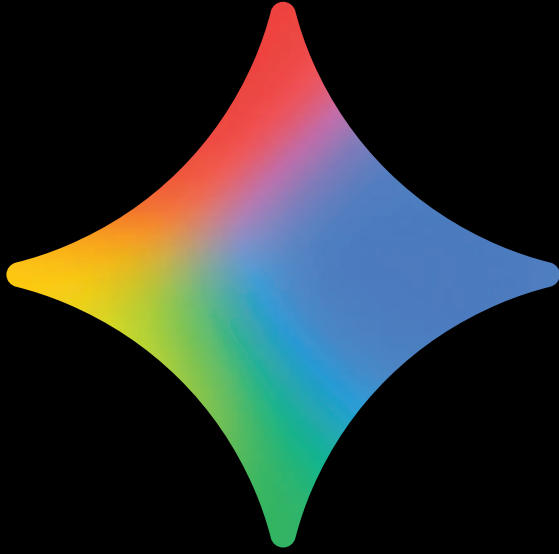


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FREE FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

2026 Baylor Football Preview



Photos courtesy of Baylor Athletics

DJ Lagway looks to turn career around

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Editor

Junior quarterback DJ Lagway came into college with hopes of being a dominant force in the SEC. He was ranked as the No. 1 quarterback in the class of 2024 out of Willis High School and joined a historically rich Florida program.

Lagway looked like he could have been next in a line of Heisman Trophy-winning quarterbacks to play for the Gators. He tried to follow in the footsteps of Steve Spurrier, Danny Wuerffel and Tim Tebow.

Lagway's legacy in Gainesville did not adhere to that blueprint.

He threw 28 touchdowns to 23 interceptions across the two seasons he donned the blue and orange, while failing to break more than 2,300 passing yards in either campaign.

It was Baylor legend Robert Griffin III that came calling when Lagway entered the transfer portal following a pair of underwhelming years at Florida. Griffin III told Lagway that he should go to a program where its success is on Lagway's back.

That led him to Baylor, his parents' alma mater. It seemed like the best answer with the family connection and with the Bears coming off a disappointing 5-7 season. Once he put on the green and gold, he finally felt free.

"I'm having fun," Lagway said. "Playing football last year, I always say I wasn't doing this."

Lagway has embraced the increased intensity as the team has transitioned from spring ball to fall camp. He has seen the group band together with more head-to-head action between Baylor's offense and defense.

"It's a lot more competitive," Lagway said. "A lot of playing complimentary football going back and forth ... We're building good football right now."

While the goal is for Lagway to settle into a new offense and find his place, offensive coordinator Jake Spavital wants to push him further. He tries to keep Lagway on his toes as practice gets progressively more situation-focused.

"I'm trying to put him in so many uncomfortable positions to see what he's capable of doing, and he's handling it well," Spavital said. "I love his command, I love his presence, I love the communication that he has and every day we're getting more comfortable."

Spavital and the Bears are well aware of Lagway's physical talents, including his deep ball accuracy, hitting over half of his deep attempts as a freshman. But what makes Lagway a premiere quarterback is his mentality. When he is at his most confident is when he performs at a top level.

"When he plays confident, I think he's one of the best quarterbacks I've seen," Spavital said. "I want to make sure that he is as confident as possible going into the first game of the season."

Lagway is no stranger to the bright lights. He started 19 games for Florida with 10 of them going against top-25 opponents. Playing in a conference known for stacking the rankings, Lagway was thrust into the big moments.

Lagway now looks to thrive in a Big 12 that premieres four teams in the preseason AP top-25 compared to the SEC's nine.

"He's not going to shy away from any moment," Spavital said. "It's always good to know that he gives life to this offense with his talent, and he doesn't have all the pressure on him."

The new field general hopes to utilize that history as he tries to lead a different offense.

"What's different is just experience," Lagway said. "I've played a lot of football, seen a lot of good, seen a lot of bad, so I know what to expect."

Lagway's relationships with his teammates have been a catalyst for his growth across the spring and fall.

"When I get around them, everything just slows down for me," Lagway said. "They've welcomed me in with open arms, and I'm thankful for them every step of the way."

Lagway emphasized a strong bond with his offense while getting accustomed to Spavital's scheme. That became one of his main focuses on and off the gridiron.

"My goals this camp are to just really connect closer with my guys," Lagway said. "Find my process for the

season and get closer with them, build a chemistry with the receivers."

While connecting passes on the field, Lagway and his receivers bonded off the field, especially during spring break.

"We went to Miami, had some fun, just to get to know him outside of football and everything," junior wide receiver Dre'lon Miller said. "Just to get to know him on a deeper level and just his plans on this year was big."

The relationships between the Baylor quarterback and his pass catchers have grown significantly despite joining the program in January.

"When he first came in, he was getting the feel for it, but once things got the rolling, this thing became a brotherhood," fifth-year wide receiver Louis Brown IV said. "It just became easy for him to just communicate and just lead by example."

Lagway is not the only one facing a transition this offseason. The Bears'

offense has gone through an overhaul after losing all but one starter from the beginning of 2025. The drastic change has not only created a challenge for Spavital and his unit but allowed the offense to recreate itself around its new core.

"We're going to have a different look than what we were last year," Spavital said. "That's been a fun part for us, is the packages that we're creating, kind of the identity, like we still want the identity of, you know, playing hard and playing selfless for each other and not beating ourselves."

Lagway and his offense look to ramp up as the calendar draws closer to their week one game against Auburn. The teams will meet at 2:30 p.m. on Sept. 5 in Atlanta at Mercedes-Benz Stadium for the Aflac Kickoff game. The game will be broadcast on ABC.



Lariat file photo

Defense enters new era under Joe Klanderman

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Writer

Baylor's defense looked to find success in 2025 behind a combination of change and continuity.

The Bears seemed confident in veteran leaders at all three levels of defense behind Devyn Bobby, Keaton Thomas and Jackie Marshall. They also found a spark in transfers like Emar'rión Winston and Travion Barnes.

The promising defense got picked apart in 2025. The unit ranked near the bottom of the Big 12 defensive standings, giving up an average of 32.6 points per game along with 392 yards per game. With former defensive coordinator Matt Powlledge leaving for North Texas, head coach Dave Aranda was forced to look for a replacement.

The Bears eventually landed on Joe Klanderman. He previously served as defensive

coordinator at Kansas State and held other defensive coaching stops at Minnesota and North Dakota State and arrives in Waco with plenty of coaching experience.

In Klanderman's six years with Kansas State, his defense's numbers consistently ranked in the top of the Big 12 and nationally. From 2021-2024, the Wildcats allowed 21.8 points per game, ranking 24th nationally. In that same span, the Wildcats caused 62 turnovers, leading the Big 12. Klanderman's defense was also an essential part of the Wildcats' 2022 Big 12 Championship run.

However, Klanderman's challenge doesn't stop at just improving Baylor's statistics. Klanderman's biggest task is establishing a new standard for a defense that lacked consistency and physicality.

"I'm trying to create something that the players can be proud of so that they do want to own it, so they do want to capture it, and so they do want to enhance it," Klanderman said.

“I'm trying to create something that the players can be proud of so that they do want to own it, so they do want to capture it, and so they do want to enhance it.
”

JOE KLANDERMAN
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR

Klanderman will not be the only new face for the Bears, as they had success in the portal, bringing in 14 new defensive players, including an overhaul of the defensive line.

Of those 14 defensive players, the Bears were able to land Hosea Wheeler. Wheeler, a defensive tackle transfer from the 2025 national champion Indiana Hoosiers, comes to Waco with extensive high-level experience. Wheeler will prove to be a fundamental part not only of the brand-new defensive line, but of the defense as a whole.

"He is dominant, and you can tell he is when he's out there," Klanderman said.

Klanderman will bring four former Wildcats with him to help boost Baylor's defense. Senior JACK Ryan Davis, fifth-year cornerback Jayden Rowe, fifth-year safety Colby McCalister and senior safety Daniel Cobbs will be featured in the Bears' new defense and will help players the

FROM UNDERDOG TO VETERAN

Jacob Redding’s journey from walk-on to safety room leader

GRANT MCTAGGART
Sports Writer

Senior safety Jacob Redding entered Baylor football at the bottom of the totem pole. Redding joined the Baylor roster as a walk-on, largely overlooked by major programs despite earning unanimous First Team All-District honors at New Braunfels High School. His freshman season, he only saw the field in three games, finishing the year without a single recorded stat.

“I always feel like there’s something to prove,” Redding said. “I’ve always had something to prove. Kind of the underdog mentality kind of my whole career.”

After establishing himself as a reliable contributor on special teams during his sophomore campaign, Redding experienced a breakout junior year. He finished the 2025 season as the team’s leader in interceptions, providing several game-changing plays for the defense.

Redding is now stepping into a larger leadership role as one of the veterans in a safety room that has gained experience and depth during the offseason. After spending much of his career working to prove himself, Redding feels like he is ready to become a more vocal presence on the field.

“I think being the outspoken leader is a step I can take, being like the field general,” Redding said.

Redding has not forgotten the outside opinions that have followed him throughout his career. His dad will send him articles about what people say about him and tell him, “This should fuel you.”

Rather than allowing those opinions to determine how he views himself, Redding said he has learned to rely on his own confidence.

“It’s just a matter of knowing your real identity and having a real confidence in yourself and not letting other people define who you are and what you do,” Redding said.

That mindset has helped create what Redding describes as an underdog mentality. Even after earning more playing time and becoming one of the veterans in the room, he said he still approaches the game as if he has something left to prove.

Proving himself is no longer Redding’s only focus. Instead, it’s shifted toward helping the entire defense rather than simply earning his own snaps.

“My goal is to do whatever the team needs, my room needs, whatever the defense needs to



Lariat File Photo

CATCHING WHEN IT COUNTS Senior safety Jacob Redding leads the team in interceptions.

win football games,” Redding said.

That contribution can take several forms. Redding may be needed to make plays on Saturdays, communicate across the secondary or help younger players develop throughout camp.

“Whether it’s making plays, whether it’s off the field leading guys, just making myself as useful as possible,” Redding said.

Redding is not the only veteran taking on that responsibility.

Baylor’s safety room has developed a mix of experience, competition and depth during the offseason. Tyler Turner, Kansas State transfer Colby McCalister and sophomore Bo Onu Jr. are among the players competing in a group that believes it has taken a step forward since spring practice.

“There is experience and a great culture in the room,” Turner said.

Turner believes being an experienced player also means taking responsibility for the development of the younger safeties.

“Help the younger guys learn their job, help them develop, and help everybody around me get better as much as I can,” Turner said.

That emphasis on development has carried into fall camp.

Turner said the safeties are now able to focus more closely on details they worked on during spring practice, instead of spending practices installing everything from the beginning.

“In the spring we got all the big stuff done and so now it’s just the little details and getting everything right and tuning up for the season,” Turner said.

McCalister has also noticed the progress.

“This defense is night and day from where we were in the spring,” McCalister said.

The increased depth gives Baylor several options at safety heading into the season. Redding said the Bears have “four or five guys” in the room capable of taking significant snaps and making plays on Saturdays.

That competition means playing time may be earned throughout camp, but the players

see the depth as an advantage rather than an obstacle.

“Whoever you throw out there, anybody could play,” Onu said.

The strengthened safety room has allowed Redding to focus on becoming a leader rather than worrying only about his own role.

That approach also fits the larger message surrounding Baylor’s fall camp. The Bears are focused less on individual expectations and more on what must be accomplished as a team.

“We’re here to win football games,” Redding said. “We could feel this was a meaningful practice. It wasn’t just day one of camp.”

As Baylor’s safeties continue competing for snaps, the room believes its combination of experience, leadership and depth has put it in a stronger position entering the season.

His underdog mentality has not disappeared. Instead, it has evolved. The same mindset that once pushed him to prove he belonged at Baylor now pushes him to become someone his teammates can depend on.



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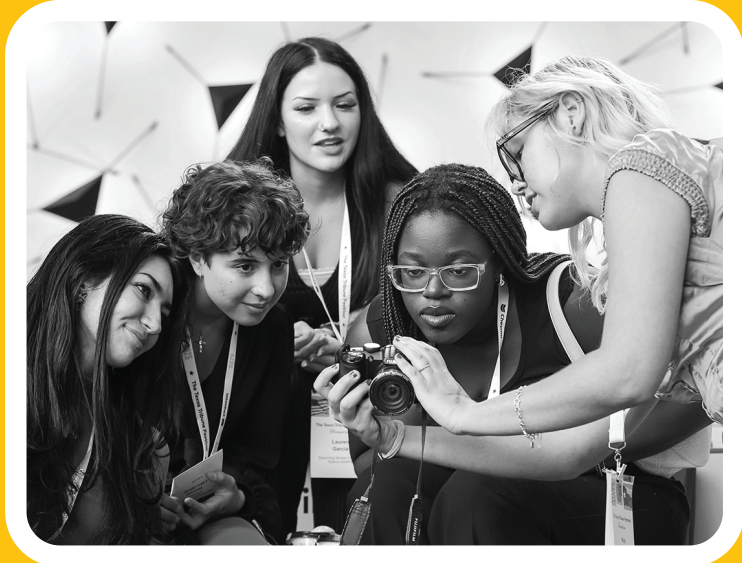
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Sports Take: 2026 Baylor football season predictions

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Editor

Many Baylor fans are down on the Bears following a disappointing 5-7 campaign in 2025. That squad had the potential to create a memorable season behind the majority of starters returning.

This year is a new story for Baylor football. There has been a major overhaul of the roster and coaching staff heading into 2026. There are some mixed feelings about this team. On one side, last year's team missing out on a bowl game and significantly new personnel could pull the Bears down. On the other side, some big names have joined the program and send Baylor back to the postseason.

Jeffrey Cohen | Sports Editor

Record: 7-5

Baylor has faced plenty of change on both sides of the ball. The offense is returning only one starter from the week one loss to Auburn last year. The defense is under new management with head coach Dave Aranda giving play calling duties to new defensive coordinator Joe Klanderman. Not all change is bad, though. Junior quarterback DJ Lagway is going under center for the team he grew up watching and the defensive line and secondary received some much needed help.

The Bears will benefit from a relatively easy schedule for most of the season. They can find themselves going 7-2 heading into the final stretch with a pair of major win streaks. They need to take advantage of weeks two through four against Prairie View A&M, Louisiana Tech and Colorado while gaining some more momentum against TCU, Kansas, UCF and Matt Campbell-less Iowa State in games six through nine.

Baylor will stumble against Auburn in the Aflac Kickoff Game and Arizona State in week five. What will separate the Bears from a successful season is the gauntlet in November. They finish their season against preseason No. 14 BYU, No. 12 Texas Tech and No. 23 Houston. This difficult three-game stretch will douse any flame Baylor tries to stoke in the final month of the season.

Carson Vercoe | Sports Writer

Record: 6-6

After a disappointing 2025 season, the Bears enter this season with enough transfer-portal talent to slide into a bowl game. The addition of Lagway helps boost an offense that lost a ton of production, and I believe Lagway will improve Baylor's offense compared to his time at Florida. Also, adding experienced defensive coordinator Joe Klanderman will help turn around a defense that struggled mightily last season. Baylor also gets their easier games at home, which could help the Bears get some wins as they move deeper into the season.

The roster's turnover is concerning. On both sides of the ball, the Bears will usher in multiple new starters. Combine that with learning new schemes, and I believe it might just be too quick of a turnaround for the Bears. The Bears also face a brutal end of the year with Texas Tech at home, at BYU and at Houston. This will be a tough stretch for the Bears, and I don't know if they have the team to get through it strongly.

Although I believe the defense will improve slightly under Klanderman and the offense will still have its moments, I just can't see this team being a top team in the Big 12. If things go right for the Bears, they could, however, find themselves competing in a bowl game.

Grant McTaggart | Sports Writer

Record: 7-5

Baylor will go 7-5 this season. The Bears will have more success than 2025 with junior quarterback DJ Lagway at the helm, bring two years of experience in the SEC with him. Baylor also hit the transfer portal hard during the offseason to cycle out the starters that left after the underwhelming 5-7 finish. Baylor still lacks some familiarity because of the drastic changes in the past couple of months. Baylor will lose the matchups against the top teams in the Big 12, including BYU and its

impressive offense.

The Bears will look very strong and take care of business more easily in their wins, but they will fall short in their hard-fought games. This team has a lot of spirit, physicality and toughness that will surprise Baylor fans this season.

Charlie Cole | LTVN Sports Reporter

Record: 7-5

The Bears have a few big questions to be answered this season, specifically the new addition of DJ Lagway. This is a team with a ton of upside in my eyes, but taking that step will prove to be a challenge. With some returning underclassmen and notable transfer portal additions, I believe Baylor is ready to improve on a disappointing 2025 season.

I predict a volatile season for the Bears, with a strong start before facing a grueling three-game stretch to end the year. Lagway has had good reports coming out of camp, and there is reason for optimism in what may be a make-or-break year for head coach Dave Aranda. The running back room brings back a lot of talent and welcomes Dawson Pendergrass back after he missed the entirety of last season. The offense should be ready to roll in 2026.

I see Baylor being an offensive-led team, but I think the defense under new coordinator Joe Klanderman will be significantly improved after giving up 32.6 points per game. With some growth from last year in the secondary, the defense should be able to do enough to keep the Bears in the middle of the pack in the Big 12, and ultimately reach a bowl game.

Brooke Cranford | LTVN Sports Director

Record: 7-5

Coming into a new season, the Bears have a lot to prove. However, there is a lot of talent that they received from the transfer portal, and it could have the chance for Baylor to start the season off strong. I see DJ Lagway as a huge benefit

to the team who can contribute a lot to the offense. Speaking of new additions, I am sure that Baylor will be an offense-first team once again, but I also believe that its defense could progress under the supervision of the new defensive coordinator, Joe Klanderman.

Unfortunately, the team doesn't really have a lot of time to build a connection that is necessary because of how hard it is to carry over that chemistry in the midst of NIL and the transfer portal. One of the most important things will be to see how fast all those newcomers are going to develop chemistry in a time when the NIL and transfer portal makes it very hard for teams to retain their rosters. I don't know if that is possible for the Bears.

The first game against Auburn is going to be a test and the season will become rather complicated towards its end with a tough period against Texas Tech, BYU and Houston. This new season could benefit the Bears and lead to a spot in the goal game if they can figure everything out in a short amount of time.

Aiden Richmond | LTVN Managing Editor

Record: 7-5

Reflecting on last spring when I was at practice, I wasn't really sure what to think about this record or the team in general, in all honesty. On paper, the roster has talent, but the chemistry part is what scares me, and in the modern era of NIL, I fear Baylor will become a builder school. You have guys come in for a year or two, let our coaches do their thing and build a player, but the money comes in. You have guys with talent transferring away from Waco, shooting us in the foot.

Do I want to believe Lagway and his ragtag group of receivers can show up like Sawyer and company last year? YES. However, it doesn't change that I think we see a split time share with senior running back Dawson Pendergrass and sophomore running back Kaden Knighten in the backfield. Knighten proved to be reliable while Dawson was out all season and former Bear Bryson Washington was banged up throughout the season, leading to his severely lackluster performance compared to his freshman year.

The defense is what scares me the most about this season. Nothing against the team last year because you must understand we took on the gauntlet toward the end of the season in a ranked Utah, Arizona and Houston. The Bears gave up the most touchdowns in the Big 12 and the second most rush yards all season. This wouldn't be an issue if it were 2014, when defense was an option for Big 12 teams, but it's 2026, and defense is needed to not just be a contender for a championship but to even win the games you're supposed to win.

Aidan O'Connor | Play-By-Play

Record: 6-6

After a 2025 campaign that fell short of expectations, Baylor will improve this season but it will not be by much.

Last year the Bear's offense was humming, scoring 31.1 points per game landing them at fifth place in the Big 12. This year it looks to be no different as offensive coordinator Jake Spavital returns along with several new weapons, such as junior quarterback DJ Lagway and junior running back Dre'lon Miller. The offense will no doubt be the strong suit of this team and will have to carry them in several games.

The defense while introducing some new faces such as senior JACK Ryan Davis and junior cornerback Devon Jordan still has questions surrounding play calling. This year calling the shots for Baylor's defense will be former Kansas State defensive coordinator Joe Klanderman. This change, while different, is not necessarily an improvement as Kansas State's defense last year sat in the bottom half of the Big 12 at 11th place, allowing 26.7 points per game. While better than Baylor's 32.6 points per game, it's still a liability.

Ultimately, the outcome for the 2026 season will be an improvement for the green and gold but just by an inch. The offense will continue to dazzle, and the defense will struggle, but they will manage to become bowl eligible once again.



vs Auburn
Sept. 5



vs Prairie View A&M
Sept. 12



vs Louisiana Tech
Sept. 19



vs Colorado
Sept. 26



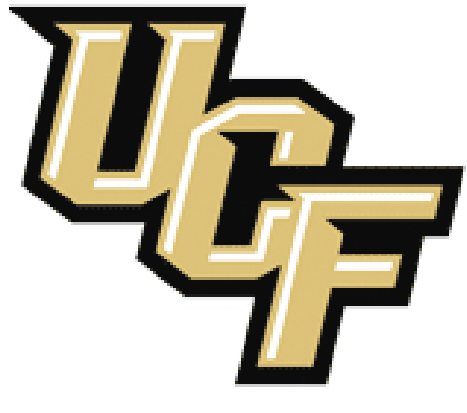
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Oct. 3



vs TCU
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NEW FACES, NEW IDENTITY

Baylor’s defensive line looks to recover from 2025 season

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Writer

As fall practices draw to a close and the new season kicks off, Baylor’s revamped defensive line is looking to create a new identity different than the one that took the field for the Bears last season. With a completely new defensive line and a proven defensive line coach, the Bears will look to right the ship at the line of scrimmage.

The Bears finished last season tied for last in the Big 12 and at the bottom of all the FBS in sacks, as well as being second to last in the Big 12 in rush yards given up per game with 197.2. The low stats, combined with a low return rate from players at the position last season, forced the Bears to revamp the defensive line.

Over the offseason, the Bears brought in someone to help address this growing problem on the defensive line. Defensive line coach Jacori Greer arrives in Waco after stops at Coastal Carolina, Louisiana Tech, Texas State and Abilene Christian. Greer brings plenty of scheme experience and football knowledge to the Bears’ defensive line.

While fixing Baylor’s defensive line will be challenging for Greer

and there may not be one simple fix or schematic change, he has kept it simple for his players: focus on the basics.

“We’re preaching the fundamentals. I don’t think we can preach it enough,” Greer said. “We say our eyes, hands and feet won’t get us beat no day of the week.”

For a group with entirely new players, Greer’s message on the fundamentals means more. Before the Bears can become a dominant defensive line through these fundamentals, Greer wants to build a connection with his players.

“I think it’s important whether it’s year one at Baylor or year 15 at Baylor, you’ve got to build that relationship to where they trust you, and they play for you,” Greer said. “I have to put time in with them. They know my ticks; I know their ticks, and that’s what makes a cohesive group.”

Building relationships with his players is step one for Greer. Next is turning that relationship into production and aggression at quarterback.

“I think our style of play is just a little different. Guys are playing the pass faster, because they are going up the field faster,” Greer said. “I think that aggression alone will help the

sack numbers.”

Greer is just one of many new faces in the defensive line room for the Bears. Through the transfer portal, the Bears landed Hosea Wheeler. The fifth-year defensive lineman and national champion at Indiana will bring dominant pressure to this defensive line.

“I bring a lot of experience, just that older guy mentality,” Wheeler said. “And that aggressive guy mentality because I’m trying to get everyone to run through some stuff.”

The Bears also grabbed another fifth-year player from South Florida in Traevon Mitchell. Mitchell comes off one of his best years at USF, where he was graded the second-best defender on the 9-3 Bulls team, and will provide another experienced presence



Fifth-year defensive end Kyler Jordan
Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics

up front.

“We are excited to have him; he gives us an element to our game that we don’t have,” Greer said.

The Bears’ defensive line portal additions don’t just stop at these two veterans. The Bears also landed senior defensive end Jordan Mack from Coastal Carolina and Garrick Ponder from Southern Miss. The transfer portal has added plenty of depth on the Bears’ line, something they lacked in 2025.

“It’s nice to be able to close your eyes and pick one of them and say go out there and know the job will be done,” Greer said. “That’s the expectation, and I told them that. I want to play as many guys as they allow me to play.”

These new faces, along with the others on the defensive line, have already impressed coaches throughout fall camp, including their coordinator, Joe Klanderman.

“Our defensive line is really good,” Klanderman said. “They’re deep, they’re explosive, they play well together, they’re playing hard.”

Early impressions from fall camp have coaches feeling optimistic about this revamped group, but it won’t be until that first snap of the season that the Bears will know just how improved this defensive line has become.



Photo courtesy of Baylor Athletics

DEFENSE! New defensive coordinator Joe Klanderman oversees the Baylor defense. He took over play-calling duties after head coach Dave Aranda previously managed the defense.

COACH from Page B1

Klanderman’s new scheme.

“Knowing the playbook from my previous school, I feel it’s my job to help the new guys and the guys who have already been here, and I feel I’ve done a good job of that,” McCalister said. “As I’ve said before, I’m an open book, so these guys can come to me and I will help them out.”

Although the defense is filled with new changes, Baylor’s defense will still feature some of the same defensive playmakers. Players like senior safety Jacob Redding, senior cornerback LeVar Thornton Jr. and senior safety Tyler Turner will be tasked with learning

a new system while still leading the new players.

“My goal is to do whatever the team needs, whatever my room needs, whatever the defense needs, to win football games,” Redding said. “Whether that’s playing 67 snaps a game, whether it’s helping the young guys develop, whether it’s making plays, whether it’s off the field leading guys, just making myself as useful as possible,” Redding said.

Baylor’s new-look defense has the pieces in place to make its leap from being a lower-tier defense in the Big 12 to one of the conference’s best, but an all-around improvement could take some time.

“In what we do, and the volume, and the checks that come with it, it’s a process that takes a couple of years, but we don’t have a couple of years,” Klanderman said. “We have weeks and months, but we did a good job in the spring and made good progress in the summer, and right now we’re at a level we haven’t been at.”

After ranking near the bottom of the Big 12 defenses, Baylor’s new-look defense will aim to create a new identity under a proven coordinator in Klanderman. Whether that identity can translate into wins and success remains to be seen.

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Sports

Baylor’s wide receiver room turns page with new core

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Writer

Baylor’s receiving core was one of the top in the Big 12, returning most of the core. Receivers like Josh Cameron, Ashtyn Hawkins and Kole Wilson helped create one of the most dominant passing attacks in the country.

Now, as the Bears head into the 2026 season, the receiver room has seen major turnover. The Bears’ top receivers from last season are gone, leaving new receivers to replace that production and experience.

The Bears will lean heavily on fourth-year wide receivers coach Dallas Baker to help



Lariat File Photo

NEW HEIGHTS Fifth-year receiver and Oklahoma State transfer Gavin Freeman jumps for a catch in spring practice.

address the lack of experience. Baker has proven he can develop young receivers. He faced the same challenge in 2022, replacing the team’s top three receivers from that year. In 2022 five receivers caught 25 or more passes.

Baker is focused on getting his receivers, who he referred to as “the goons,” to focus on the little things, like the basics, as well as his players’ ability to push through tough conditions, but above all, having his players put the team first.

“The goons are made of, first, the fundamentals and technique,” Baker said. “Fundamentals are the baseline, like blocking and running routes; the technique is what you do to get it done ... The second thing is tough ... The third thing is the selfless piece.”

Baker has leaned into his experience as a former NFL receiver to adapt to his new guys and the personalities they bring, helping foster a connection in the room.

“I know how to deal with personalities, because I was in the room with them,” Baker said. “All my coaches had to deal with personalities, and now I am able to do the same thing.”

Baker’s coaching abilities will be put to the test with a receiving room full of new faces looking to break onto the scene. While the Bears may have lost their top producers, many young, hungry receivers will have their shot to fill the void.

One of the more experienced players in the room will be fifth-year Gavin Freeman. Freeman transferred from Oklahoma State after having his best year, recording 53 receptions, 481 yards and four touchdowns. Freeman will serve as a veteran presence for this new, young group.

“It’s challenging for sure, because you know they didn’t all come together and come in at the same time,” Freeman said. “But being able to be open-minded with everyone and knowing everyone’s personality helps a lot.”

Fifth-year Louis Brown IV will be a familiar face in the room for Baker, as he was part of the team last season but ended up redshirting four games into the season. Brown IV will be a consistent target for new transfer junior quarterback DJ Lagway.

“We got a room that can set the tempo and start fast with the guys we got,” Brown IV said. “It’s a versatile room, and we can be a very explosive offense.”

The room will also feature Colorado transfer junior Dre’lon Miller and sophomore Taz Williams Jr., both of whom will be heavily involved in the passing attack.

As fall camp progresses, offensive coordinator Jake Spavital has been pleased with



Lariat File Photo

RUNNING IT BACK Fifth-year receiver Louis Brown IV caught his only touchdown of last season against Samford but redshirted a week later to maintain eligibility for this year.

the way the receivers have grown.

“They all bring a different type of game. You have some smaller, twitchier receivers; you have some big outside receiver types that can body guys, so you’re going to see these guys play all over the field,” Spavital said. “We have a solid eight that I am confident in.”

Whether these receivers can replace the production of a competitive receiving group from last season remains to be seen, but with the coaching expertise of Baker and the continued growth of these receivers, Baylor football is in a good spot heading into the season.

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