

Baylor Lariat

WE'RE THERE WHEN YOU CAN'T BE

DECEMBER 3, 2018



COMEBACK SZN

Bowl Issue 2018

Bears face Vanderbilt in the Texas bowl

ADAM GIBSON
Sports Writer

Baylor football is headed to its eighth bowl game in the last nine years as it travels to the Academy Sports + Outdoors Texas Bowl at 8 p.m. on Dec. 27 in Houston to face Vanderbilt.

Head coach Matt Rhule lead the Bears to a 7-17 record over his first two years as Baylor football's head coach and has turned the program from a one-win team into a bowl contender. Rhule said going to a bowl game for the seniors is something the class deserves and is a great way to end their time with the team before graduating.

"I can't understand everything that they've been through," Rhule said. "To come out where it's a positive story and all the tweets today are happy, all the guys are fired up and excited, they did that. And they earned it. They did that through hard work. If you learn a lesson coming out of our program, it's that hard work isn't punishment. If you want something in life you have to earn it. For me, it's just like a step. We got to 6-6. We got to a bowl game."

Facing an SEC team is never easy and that is exactly what the Bears will have to prepare for going into the next couple weeks of bowl practice. Vanderbilt is coming off winning three out of their four previous games, ending its season with a 38-13 win over Tennessee. Vanderbilt senior quarterback Kyle Shurmur threw for a season high three touchdowns and 367 yards, completing 31 of his 35 passes for a completion percentage of 88.6 percent, all season highs. With all three touchdowns going to different receivers, Shurmur knows how to spread the ball around.

Now that Rhule and the Bears know who the opponent will be, he said in the end it doesn't matter who they face because it is something out of their control and they knew they were going to have to get ready to face a solid team either way.

"The respect I have for Vanderbilt [and] coach [Derek] Mason, they had to win their last two games to get bowl eligible. They went out and earned this. They're going to be excited to play," Rhule said. "We're playing one of the best quarterbacks in the country. They know how to play defense. I think all those things will be really good for our team. We need to go out and defend a really good quarterback. We need to see if we can play better up front versus a really good SEC defensive line."

Baylor is dealing with a couple players who



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

IN STRIDE Baylor junior wide receiver Denzel Mims runs past the Texas defense for a touchdown on Oct. 13 in Austin. The Bears accepted an invitation to the Academy Sports + Outdoors Texas Bowl to face Vanderbilt at 8 p.m. Dec. 27 in Houston.

are out with injury beginning with senior punter Drew Galitz who tore his ACL and will be out for the remainder of the year. Junior kicker Connor Martin will fill in to take over some of the duties in place of Galitz on special teams. In the Texas Tech game, senior wide receiver Jalen Hurd banged up his knee and despite Rhule telling him he "shouldn't play because he has a big NFL future ahead", he still competed in the game. His status for the bowl game will not be officially determined until the coaches see how he looks in practice.

Senior offensive lineman Blake Blackmar has been on three teams, including this season, that made bowl eligibility. He had to go through last year only winning one game and came into this season knowing he might not be able to go to another bowl game. Now that the Bears are playing Vanderbilt in the Texas Bowl, Blackmar said this shows just how far the team has come and how encouraging this is for the program going into the upcoming years.

"We were all able to see the things we did last year and see how close we were to ... winning some games and doing a lot of good things. And we just never quite sealed the deal," Blackmar said. "We've made a ton of progress and big strides. To be able to seal the deal and go to a bowl game now — and, you know, it is really a turning point for the team and, hopefully, for how we're going to lead Baylor going forward."

During the practices, Rhule and the coaching staff are going to try to get as much preparation and confidence instilled in the players for them to be ready for Dec. 27. Playing players at different positions is going to be a main focus for the team.

The coaches know this is the last game for the seniors before some aim to make it to the NFL and will also be putting them in those different positions to best make that happen. One thing Rhule did on the first day of bowl practice was get the younger players to understand how competitive the game will be and how hard they need to practice in order to be successful.

"There are recruits sitting around and you would think that I would be shaking hands, but no, I want them to know even though you are not playing, I want you to understand that they need to feel the pressure and I want them to produce and perform and I was proud they responded and they did ... When you go out to be the quarterback, when you go out to be the left tackle, there is one standard we want you to play," Rhule said.

Seniors leaving their mark on the program

BEN EVERETT
Sports Editor

When the current senior class arrived on Baylor's campus their freshman year, the Baylor football program was in a much different place.

The Bears had won back-to-back Big 12 Championships and were looking to add to their trophy case, holding the No. 4 ranking in the preseason Associated Press poll and hopes for a College Football Playoff bid.

Things quickly changed.

Baylor quarterbacks Seth Russell and Jarrett Stidham suffered season-ending injuries and the Bears finished the season 10-3 after a win in the Russell Athletic Bowl. After the season, a program-rocking scandal broke which saw head coach Art Briles fired.

While players such as Stidham and quarterback Chris Johnson transferred away and high-level recruits such as Kameron Martin, Kellen Mond and Devin Duvernay de-committed from Baylor, others stuck with the program.

Jim Grobe was hired to be Baylor's interim head coach in 2016 while the Bears searched for a long-term fit. The Bears went 7-6 in Grobe's lone year in Waco.

In 2017, Matt Rhule made his debut as Baylor's head coach. A 1-11 season followed.

Better times were ahead, according to Rhule. The second-year head coach promised a bowl game in his second season.

Sitting at 5-5 on Nov. 16, the Bears had the opportunity to make that bowl dream come true with a home game against



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

ON THE RUN Baylor senior wide receiver Jalen Hurd jukes a Kansas State defender on Oct. 6 at McLane Stadium. Hurd was the Bears' leading receiver this season with 946 yards and four touchdowns.

rival TCU. The Horned Frogs came away with a 16-9 victory on Baylor's senior night. Senior offensive lineman Patrick Lawrence said the loss to TCU was one of the toughest of his career.

"It's really tough, heartbreaking honestly," Lawrence said. "Been here since me and my class played the first game in McLane and just really would have been a storybook ending to go get it done against TCU [in our] last game here, but it didn't work out. We've got to live with that and get ready for next week."

Baylor's bowl eligibility came down to a matchup with Texas Tech on Nov. 24 in Arlington. The Bears prevailed 35-24 to finish off the regular season bowl eligible. Senior offensive lineman Blake Blackmar said securing bowl eligibility in his senior season was a great feeling.

"Of all of the games I've been a part of, this is probably the most special," Blackmar said. "You think of all of the things we've been through and everything that could have happened and would have happened, and you gotta shut all of that out ... It just feels great. Almost an indescribable feeling on the field being able to grab your brothers and celebrate."

Senior receiver Jalen Hurd had multiple lingering injuries leading up to the Texas Tech game, but he played and notched three receptions for 41 yards. Rhule said he told Hurd to sit out because he didn't want to risk his professional football career, but Hurd insisted on playing against the Red Raiders.

"It was something in his knee, something in his ankle. He just got invited to Senior Bowl. [He's] probably a first-round draft pick. [I said], 'Jalen, you should sit this one out.' He was like, 'No, Coach. I'm playing.'"

Senior wide receiver Chris Platt had his best game of the season, catching six passes for a season-high 114 yards against the Red Raiders. Platt, who had his junior season cut short due to a left knee injury, struggled this year. Before the Texas Tech game, Platt had just 390 receiving yards, his lowest mark since his freshman year. Rhule said Platt has been inconsistent since his injury, so his performance against Texas Tech was reassuring.

"What a day by Chris Platt to step up," Rhule said. "Coming

off the knee [injury]. And things haven't always gone to him this year the way he wanted. I thought he made some unbelievable plays. That was the key to me today."

“

You think of all the things we've been through and everything that could have happened ... Almost an indescribable feeling on the field being able to grab your brothers and celebrate.”

BLAKE BLACKMAR |
SENIOR OFFENSIVE LINEMAN

Other senior contributors for the Bears include safety Verkedric Vaughns, defensive tackle Ira Lewis, All-Big 12 first team punter Drew Galitz, quarterback Jan McClendon, cornerback Derrek Thomas, defensive ends Greg Roberts and Xavier Jones and offensive linemen Josh Malin and Christian Beard.

Going from 10 wins in 2015 to one win in 2017, the seniors have experienced up-and-down careers. They will have a chance to get one final victory in a Baylor uniform when they face Vanderbilt at 8 p.m. Dec. 27 in the Texas Bowl in Houston.



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

ONE LAST GO Baylor senior wide receiver Chris Platt poses with the trophy after the Bears defeated Texas Tech on Nov. 24 in Arlington. Platt had a season-high 114 receiving yards in the 35-24 bowl-clinching win over the Red Raiders.

Improved offense helps Bears reach bowl game

NOAH TORR

Broadcast Reporter

The offensive side of the football is becoming extremely important, especially in the Big 12 Conference.

Look at Oklahoma. They're the fourth-ranked team in the country and will be representing the Big 12 in the College Football Playoff. Their offense is one of the best in the country, averaging an NCAA-leading 50.3 points per game. Kyler Murray, the quarterback for Oklahoma, led the high powered Sooners to an 11-1 season, in which only two games they scored below 45 points.

Offenses keep getting better and to keep up, you have to have a great quarterback and an excellent supporting cast. This season, Baylor did just that.

After a disappointing 2017 campaign where the Bears went 1-11, head coach Matt Rhule knew where he needed to improve on offense and it all started with the quarterback position. Rhule started the season with a competition between sophomore Charlie Brewer and graduate transfer Jalan McClendon. After three games, it was apparent who Rhule favored.

"He's got that 'it' factor to him," Rhule said before the season about Brewer. "[Last season] he was a true freshman laughing and telling me to calm down."

The trust Rhule had in Brewer paid off. Brewer finished the season with 2,635 yards, 17 touchdowns, and

a completion percentage of 57. He initially battled against McClendon for the starting QB position and it was clear he won the job when he started the game against the Kansas Jayhawks in October.

After the Kansas game, Rhule said the Brewer did everything he needed to in order to stay on the field for the Bears.

"He just scored," Rhule said. "He moved the ball the first drive, and he moved the ball the second drive. I said, 'Okay, let's give him one more series, see if he scores.' The ball was moving and that's what we needed."

Another key factor for Baylor this season was the wide receiving core.

Leading the charge was junior Denzel Mims and senior Jalen Hurd.

Mims finished the season with 699 yards and eight touchdowns. While he wasn't necessarily the go-to guy every time for Baylor, he was the big body in the end zone they could target when they needed a critical touchdown. In the game against Oklahoma State, Mims caught the final touchdown of the game to put Baylor over the top and win the homecoming game 35-31.

Hurd was Brewer's favorite short field target. He finished the season with 946 yards receiving and four touchdowns. He also dabbled in a little running back for the Bears

and rushed for 209 yards and three touchdowns.

The mix of freshmen Josh Fleeke and Tyquan Thornton, senior Chris Platt, and junior Marques Jones filled in the rest of the corps and were mainly used as deep threats for Brewer and the high-powered Baylor offense.

Hurd and Platt are seniors, so the Bears will have to find replacements for them next season. Hurd is expected to be a high draft pick at wide receiver. Mims has not specified his plan of action.

Finally, junior JaMychal Hasty and sophomores John Lovett and Trestan Ebner rounded out the run game with

a little help in short yardage situation from Hurd.

The run game had some issues this season and never really found a solid foundation. Rhule rotated between all three running backs until the last two games of the season when he relied on Lovett and Ebner more because of a knee injury to Hasty.

Lovett was the leading rusher for the Bears with 546 yards from scrimmage and five touchdowns. Hasty finished the season with 376 yards from scrimmage and three touchdowns in 10 games. Ebner was utilized more as a passing option for Baylor and had 239 receiving yards paired with 323 yards from scrimmage but no touchdowns.

Ebner and Lovett are sophomores and will be returning next year and while Hasty is a junior and will have the chance to go professional.

Even though only one offensive player, Jalen Hurd, received Big 12 honors, Lovett said he's still proud of his team.

"I've been through a lot with these same guys since last year," Lovett said. "And we came a long way and we're here."

The 2018 Baylor offense compared to the 2017 Baylor offense is leaps and bounds better. The Bears averaged almost a full four more points per game this year than they did last. Baylor will use that offense to try to finish the year 7-6 when they face Vanderbilt at 8 p.m. Dec. 27 in the Texas Bowl in Houston.

Defense learning quickly under new coaching staff

NOAH TORR

Broadcast Reporter

Football is evolving and while offense is the focal point of the evolution, defenses are becoming more important in college football. For Baylor, it's become a serious focal point for head coach Matt Rhule.

At Rhule's previous coaching stop, Temple University, defense was an issue in the first season as well. Phil Snow, Baylor's defensive coordinator, was also at Temple with Rhule and came under scrutiny because of his defense's poor play.

Rhule said that during his first year at Temple, many wanted Snow fired, but by the end of season two, he was asking for money to keep Snow.

"I think we have a lot of good players," Rhule said before the season started. "My experience working for coach Phil Snow it usually takes two years for guys to get it."

And after year two, the progress isn't fast but it is evident.

In 2017, Baylor's defense allowed 35.9 points per game and in 2018 it dropped to 31.2. The total yardage allowed didn't drop below 400 but it did dip from 456.9 to 412.6. The touchdowns allowed did stay roughly the same with about two passing and rushing touchdowns per game.

One concern for the defense was turnovers. Before the game against Texas Tech, Baylor was one of the worst in the country in creating interceptions with five on the season. The Bears snagged two in their game bringing the total up to seven, but they're still tied for 94th in the country in creating interceptions.

After the game against Tech, senior defensive lineman Ira Lewis said he was proud of how the defense played.

"We had emphasis that we had to play well," Lewis said. "We felt we could build off TCU. We had to keep playing hard. Other guys bought in. So everybody just played hard and did their job."

In 2017, Baylor had three defensive players earn honorable mentions from the Big 12. This season, sophomore defensive end James Lynch and junior linebacker Clay Johnston were both selected to the All Big 12 Second Team and five

others were selected as honorable mentions on the defensive end.

Before the season, Rhule said that he and his staff studied Iowa State and Texas' defensive schemes to see how they were able to combat the Big 12's high powered offenses.

"I think what Iowa State and Texas did really changed the outcome of the season for a lot of teams last year," Rhule said. "It'll be interesting to see who does it and how much success they have with it, where it goes this season."

This season, Iowa State only had one game where their opponent scored over 40 points and Texas only had two games. Baylor is right behind Texas with only three games where opponents scored 40 or more points.

The old saying goes "progress not perfection" and the foundation Rhule has been laying for his team emulates that. It may be slow, but Rhule said he's happy with how his team played this season and that they made it into the collegiate postseason.



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

ROOM TO RUN Baylor sophomore quarterback Charlie Brewer rushes the ball against TCU on Nov. 17 at McLane Stadium. Brewer and the Bears' offense improved drastically over the course of a year to help Baylor go from one win to six. The Bears face Vanderbilt at 8 p.m. Dec. 27 at the Texas Bowl in Houston.



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

STOP THE RUN The Baylor defense stuffs Texas quarterback Sam Ehlinger on Oct. 13 in Austin. The Bears fell 23-17 but held the Longhorns to their second-lowest point total of the season. Baylor's defense has given up 31.2 points per game this season, a five point improvement from last year.



Liesje Powers | Multimedia Editor

GET HYPED Baylor senior safety Verkedric Vaughns and the Baylor defense celebrate after stopping the Abilene Christian offense on Sept. 1 at McLane Stadium.

Baylor in
2017

24.3
points per game

405
yards per game

35.9
points given up
per game

457
yards given up
per game

Baylor in
2018

28.3
points per game

442
yards per game

31.2
points given up
per game

413
yards given up
per game

ROAD TO...

Sept. 1: Abilene Christian



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

Game Highlights:

- Top Passing: QB Jalan McLendon
- 173 yds, 2 touchdowns
- Top Rushing: RB John Lovett
- 115 yds, 12 carries, 3 touchdowns
- Top Receiving: WR Denzel Mims
- 80 yds, 3 receptions
- Top Defender: S Chris Miller
- 7 total tackles

Moment of the game: Linebacker Terrel Bernard intercepted an ACU pass to run the ball back to the ACU 16 yd line.



Sept. 8: University of Texas San Antonio



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

Game Highlights:

- Top Passing: QB Charlie Brewer
- 328 yds, 3 touchdowns
- Top Rushing: RB John Lovett
- 47 yds, 9 carries
- Top Receiving: WR Jalen Hurd
- 136 yds, 1 touchdown, 8 receptions
- Top Defender: LB Terrel Bernard
- 7 total tackles, 1 sack

Moment of the game: Charlie Brewer stunned with a trick play where he caught a pass for a first down in the second quarter.



Sept. 22: University of Kansas



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

Game Highlights:

- Top Passing: QB Charlie Brewer
- 221 yds, 3 touchdowns
- Top Rushing: RB JaMycal Hasty
- 60 yds, 5 carries
- Top Receiving: WR Josh Fleecks
- 65 yds, 5 receptions, 1 touchdown
- Top Defender: S Verkedric Vaughns
- 7 total tackles

Moment of the game: Freshman wide receiver Josh Fleecks caught his first career touchdown on a 34-yd pass from QB Charlie Brewer



Oct. 6: Kansas State



Liesje Powers | Multimedia Editor

Game Highlights:

- Top Passing: QB Charlie Brewer
- 296 yds, 1 touchdown, 1 interception
- Top Rushing: RB Trestan Ebner
- 100 yds, 17 carries,
- Top Receiving: WR Jalen Hurd
- 135 yds, 11 receptions
- Top Defender: S Chris Miller
- 8 total tackles

Moment of the game: Kicker Connor Martin brought home the victory with a 29-yd field goal in the last eight seconds of the game.



Nov. 24: Texas Tech



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

Game Highlights:

- Top Passing: QB Charlie Brewer
- 308 yds, 3 touchdowns, 1 interception
- Top Rushing: RB John Lovett
- 125 yds, 28 carries, 1 touchdown
- Top Receiving: WR Chris Platt
- 114 yds, 6 receptions
- Top Defender: LB Clay Johnston
- 12 total tackles

Moment of the game: Baylor became bowl eligible by holding off Texas Tech, 35-24.



Nov. 3: Oklahoma State



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

Game Highlights:

- Top Passing: QB Jalan McLendon
- 102 yds, 1 interception
- Top Rushing: RB John Lovett
- 104 yds, 6 carries, 1 touchdown
- Top Receiving: WR Jalen Hurd
- 96 yds, 7 receptions, 1 touchdown
- Top Defender: LB Clay Johnston
- 17 total tackles

Moment of the game: Wide receiver Denzel Mims snatched the ball in the end zone for a last minute touchdown, putting the Bears ahead with just seven seconds left.



THE BOWL

Texas Bowl — Dec. 27 @ Houston vs Vanderbilt University

SINGLE DIGIT
SWAG

Head coach Matt Rhule awards single digit jerseys to players who have proven to him and to the entire team that they are the toughest on the field. Eight players have been given these special numbers, with only the No. 2 spot on the roster remaining.

1

Vekedric Vaughns, senior safety



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist



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3

Chris Miller, junior safety

4

Grayland Arnold, junior corner-back



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5

Jalen Hurd, senior wide reciever

6

JaMycal Hasty, junior running back



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7

John Lovett, soph. running back

8

Henry Black, junior linebacker/safety



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MJ Routh | Multimedia Journalist

9

Ira Lewis, senior defensive tackle



Associated Press

BIG PLAYS Vanderbilt tight end Cody Markel catches a 2-yard touchdown pass ahead of Tennessee defensive back Nigel Warrior in the second half of a game on Nov. 24 in Nashville. Vanderbilt beat Tennessee 38-13 and will take on Baylor in the Texas Bowl on Dec. 27 in Houston.

Commodores ready to go bowling after 6-6 season

BAILEY BRAMMER
Broadcast Managing Editor

Baylor is all set to go bowling on Dec. 27, in Houston where they will take on the Vanderbilt Commodores in the Texas Bowl.

Both teams went 6-6 on the season and neither team has made a bowl game appearance since 2016. The Commodores are led by head coach Derek Mason and finished sixth overall in the SEC-East, winning three of their last four games on the road to the bowl.

“They had to win their last two games to be bowl eligible,” said Baylor head coach Matt Rhule. “They went out and earned this, they’re going to be excited to play. We’re playing one of the best quarterbacks in the country and they know how to play defense. All those things will be really good for our team. We need to go out and defend a really good quarterback and we need to see if we can play really good up front versus an SEC defensive line.”

Senior quarterback Kyle Shurmur has passed for 2,844 yards this season and trails the school’s all-time career passer record by just 118 yards. Jay Cutler, former NFL quarterback, currently holds this Vanderbilt record, however Shurmur already broke Cutler’s career record for touchdown passes with 23.

The Bears will also have to watch out for redshirt junior running back Ke’Shawn Vaughn, who boasts 1,001 rushing yards as well as 10 rushing touchdowns and 2 receiving touchdowns.

Vanderbilt began its season with big back-to-back non-conference wins over

Middle Tennessee University on Sept. 1 and Nevada University on Sept. 8. The Does then took on No. 3 Notre Dame in Indiana on Sept. 16 and almost upset the Fighting Irish. Vanderbilt held Notre Dame to only two touchdowns and held them scoreless in the third quarter, but the Fighting Irish ultimately came out on top and won 22-17.

In tougher matches, the Does struggled to remain consistent. Vanderbilt lost to South Carolina at home on Sept. 22, but then took down Tennessee State on Sept. 29 in a close 31-27 comeback win.

The Commodores went on a three-game losing streak to ranked teams, dropping the ball to Georgia on Oct. 6, Florida on Oct. 13 and Kentucky on Oct. 20. While the game against Georgia was a blowout, Vanderbilt stayed close to both Florida and Kentucky and held their high-powered offenses on key plays.

In an end-of-the-season spurt,

Vanderbilt won three of its last four games, defeating Arkansas on Oct. 27, Ole Miss on Nov. 17 and longtime rival Tennessee on Nov. 24 to secure bowl eligibility.

Vanderbilt and Baylor have played each other twice, and the Bears won both match-

ups: 47-6 in Waco in 1953 and 25-19 in Nashville in 1954. The Commodores have nine bowl appearances and a 4-1-3 all-time bowl record.

Rhule and Mason coached against each other when Rhule was at Temple in 2014 in Mason’s first game as head coach.

“I thought it was really cool for us to play an SEC team ... I’ve had a chance to coach against Coach Mason before, he’s a tremendous coach,” Rhule said. “We know

it will be a great challenge, one that we’re excited about, and we’re looking forward to [it].”

The Commodores and the Bears take the field at 8 p.m. on Dec. 27 in Houston.

Vanderbilt University
Fast Facts

Nickname:
Commodores
Mascots:
Mr. Commodore
Location:
Nashville
Head Coach:
Derek Mason
2017 Record: 5-7
Last Bowl Game:
2016 Independence Bowl, 41-17 loss to NC State



Associated Press

RECORD BREAKER Vanderbilt quarterback Kyle Shurmur passes against Tennessee in the first half of a game on Nov. 24 in Nashville.

Bowl Issue



Jason Pedreros | Multimedia Journalist

PURE JOY Baylor head coach Matt Rhule and senior quarterback Jalen McClendon share a moment after the Bears' 35-24 bowl-clinching win over Texas Tech on Nov. 24 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington.

Bowl bid a major step in the right direction for Matt Rhule

BEN EVERETT
Sports Editor

Five wins was not going to be enough. After second-year head coach Matt Rhule promised Baylor fans a bowl game, Baylor Nation was not about to let him off the hook if he came up short.

From early season quarterback controversy to seemingly weekly special teams miscues to the defense giving up big play after big play, there have been plenty of ways in which the Baylor coaching staff can be heavily scrutinized. Baylor fans would have put each of these topics under the microscope if the Bears had finished with five wins.

But they didn't.

Success erases doubt. At least for some time. Baylor fans will now spend their holiday season planning around watching Rhule and his team compete in a bowl game for the first time since he was hired as the Bears' lead man. If they win? Icing on top of a spectacular redemption story cake. If they lose? It's a young team and its only Rhule's second year at the helm. Give them some time.

One thing is for certain, however:

SPORTS TAKE

Rhule needed to reach this point. He put some unnecessary pressure on himself by declaring before the season even started that this team would reach a bowl, but with the talent this team has, missing out on postseason play would have been underperforming.

Quarterback Charlie Brewer is a stud. Jalen Hurd is an NFL-caliber wide receiver. Denzel Mims is one of the most talented receivers in the Big 12. The offensive line is laden with experience. James Lynch is an All-Big 12 defensive force. Clay Johnston could be the Big 12's best linebacker once he plays a full season. The secondary is experienced and versatile.

Don't get me wrong. This team doesn't have the level of talent the 2013 and 2014 Big 12 Champions had. It's not particularly close. But this roster is set up for success. A large part of that is due to Rhule. He went and got those talented freshmen and sophomores. He convinced Hurd and cornerback Derrek Thomas to spend their final seasons of eligibility wearing green and gold.

He put together this roster. The question was whether or not he could win with it.

There were some ups and downs. The Bears probably should have beaten a Daniel Jones-less Duke team at home. They had Texas on the ropes in Austin and couldn't finish. The offense was a no-show against arch-rival TCU. Six wins could have been eight. But the important part is that they made a bowl. If six wins was four, there would be some calling for a coaching change. I would definitely have my doubts.

In a Q&A with The Daily Athenaeum, I wrote that Baylor might have a chance to compete for a Big 12 Championship in 2021 and beyond once the entire team is Rhule's recruits and the coaching staff has fully implemented their culture and schemes. At Temple, Rhule went 2-10 in his first year, 6-6 in his second year and then won the American Athletic Conference in back-to-back years with 10 win seasons.

So far at Baylor, we've got 1-11 and 6-6. If Rhule can win the Big 12 title next year, this would be one of the greatest rebuilding jobs in college football history. But for now, he's on track to return the Bears to relevance and consistency.

The Matt Rhule Process

TEMPLE	Post-season?
2013	
2-10	NO
2014	
6-6	NO
2015	
10-4	YES
2016	
10-3	YES
BAYLOR	
2017	
1-11	NO
2018	
6-6	YES

What to do in Houston

EXPLORE

- NASA Space Center
- Houston Museum of Natural Science
- Cockrell Butterfly Center
- Children's Museum of Houston
- James Turrell Sky Space
- Chinatown
- Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern
- The Galleria Houston
- Historic 19th Street
- Washington Avenue Arts District
- White Oak Music Hall
- Discovery Green
- Waugh Bridge Bats

EAT

- Hugo's - \$\$\$
- Caracol Restaurant - \$\$\$
- Frank's Pizza - \$
- The Breakfast Klub - \$\$
- Brennan's of Houston - \$\$
- Kenny & Ziggy's
- New York Delicatessen - \$\$
- Uchi - \$\$
- The Pass & Provisions - \$\$\$\$
- The Original Ninfa's - \$\$
- Local Foods Rice Village - \$\$
- Lankford's Grocery & Market - \$
- State of Grace - \$\$\$
- Bombay Pizza Co. - \$\$
- Xochi - \$\$

SLEEP

- Mariott Marquis Houston
- Hilton Americas-Houston
- Hotel Derek
- Hotel Icon
- Royal Sonesta Houston
- Hotel Zaza
- The Post Oak Hotel
- The Houstonian
- Hotel Alessandra
- Club Quarters Hotel
- Hotel Ylem
- Four Seasons Houston
- Haven Inn & Suites
- The Magnolia-Houston
- The Whitehall

Texas Bowl Baylor vs Vanderbilt

Dec. 27, 2018
NRG Stadium, Houston

