

Football Preview

THIS IS BEAR COUNTRY



READY TO RUN Bruiser stands in front of the Baylor Chamber members as they hold off Baylor students that prepare to run the line before the football team's home opener against the University of Albany on Sept. 3, 2022 at McLane Stadium. Roundup file photo



TOSS & TWIRL One of Baylor's baton twirlers shows off during halftime against the University at Albany on Sept. 3, 2022 at McLane Stadium. Roundup file photo



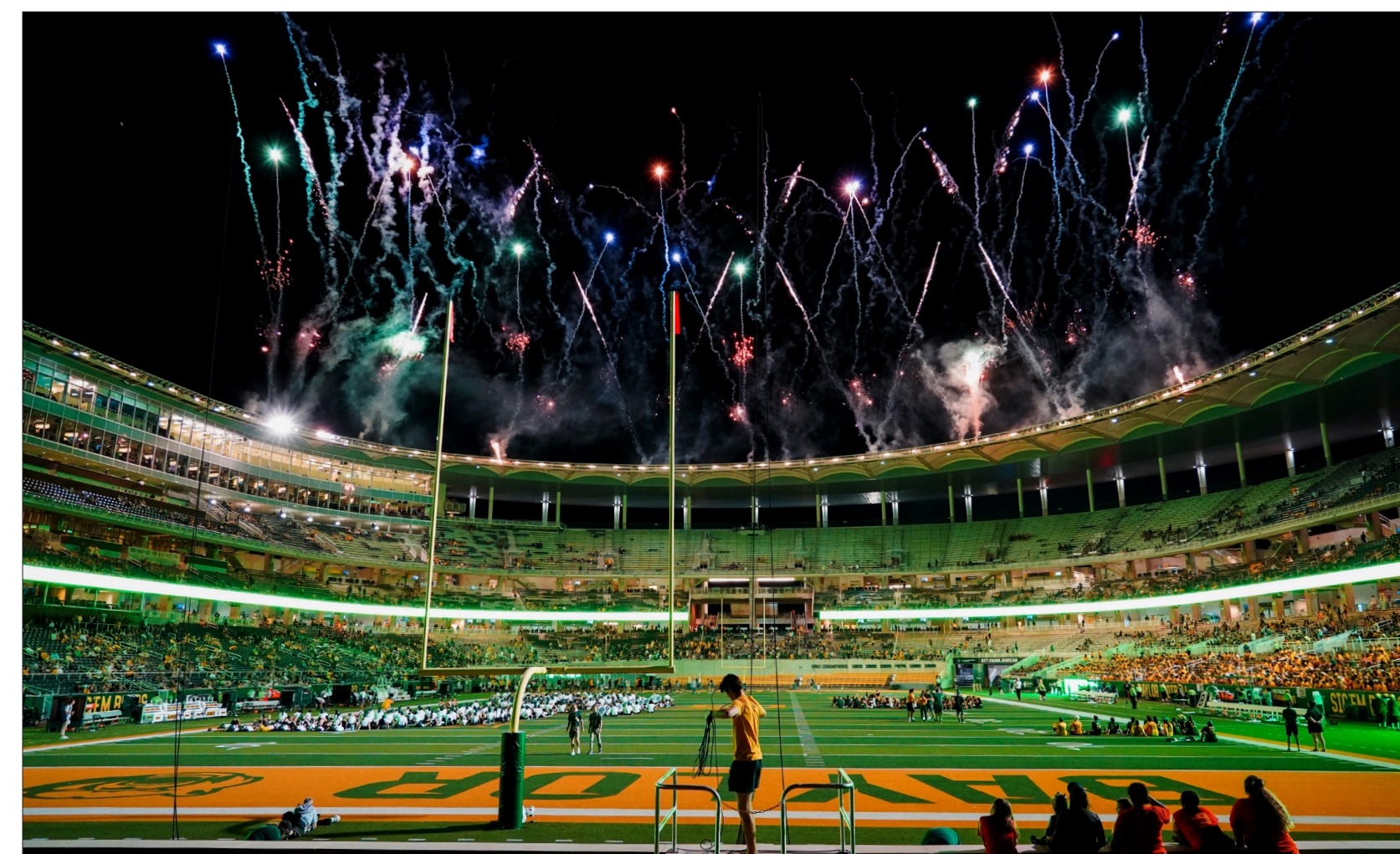
SIC 'EM The Baylor Spirit Squad amps up fans during the football team's home opener against the University at Albany on Sept. 3, 2022 at McLane Stadium. Roundup file photo



PUMP IT UP A member of the Golden Wave Band plays the trombone during a game against the University at Albany on Sept. 3, 2022 at McLane Stadium. Roundup file photo



CHEERS A member of the Baylor Spirit Squad starts a chant during the football team's home opener against the University at Albany on Sept. 3, 2022 at McLane Stadium. Roundup file photo



LIGHT THE NIGHT Fireworks shine in the sky at McLane Stadium following the football team's non-conference contest against the University at Albany on Sept. 3, 2022. Roundup file photo

The Baylor community reacted to league realignment

Karen Mix, Office Manager for Sociology at Baylor

Conferences are not only about football, and the conferences only looked at money in this realignment. Other student athletes will be affected, and I fear their mental and physical health as well as their academic performance will be negatively impacted due to the increased travel

they will experience. Football travels the least out of all the sport programs and some teams play multiple times during the week during their season, which leads to less time recovering their bodies. I believe conferences should be held by region, not how much money schools can potentially receive.

Houston senior Josh Farish

I think it can be good to bring together more competitive teams. I worry about managing all of the teams and the distance between the schools. Overall, I'm happy the Big XII came out of it strong and Baylor doesn't need to find a new home.

San Marcos freshman Acascia Mata

All of the additions and departures of programs from our conference has been very confusing, intimidating and frustrating. I have a feeling that without knowing all the changes, there are going to have a huge impact on our football program and performance.

Melissa senior Nathaniel Lambert

It's been great because it opens more doors for the conference moving westward. There's definitely teams that I wish we could've thrown into the conference, like getting UConn for basketball or SMU for fan loyalty

and regional rivalry (the enemy of my enemy is my friend), but I know what we did get is amazing. I think I expect a friendship with ASU, and I think BYU is the next rivalry that students dig into because of the religious competition.

We heard your feedback, so here's The Baylor Lariat Sports Desk's responses and analysis as we prepare for the 2023 football season

Michael Haag, Sports Editor

Record: 6-6
Why: As compelling as the odd-year magic debate is, I have to keep it real. This Baylor football team has the makings of a great team, and the vibes are seemingly higher than ever. However, I can't ignore the fact that there are two major question marks entering the season. It starts with the offensive line, which head coach Dave Aranda seems very optimistic about. Personally, though, I don't see this group turning heads and dominating since it lacks starts at the green and gold. Bringing in fifth-year senior offensive lineman Clark Barrington and junior offensive lineman Campbell Barrington from Brigham Young University was huge, but it's hard to imagine that those two are going to be enough. Offensive line coach Eric Mateos and offensive coordinator Jeff Grimes are strong O-line coaches, but the players have to execute at the end of the day, and I don't think this current group will do that in 2023.

The secondary is the other spot on the depth chart that should have Baylor fans biting their nails. There are high-character athletes in that room that appear to have strong instincts and potential, but their youth could be their demise. Guys like Devin Lemear, Alfonzo Allen and Bryson Jackson will rise to the top of the ranks, but it's not going to be enough. Growing pains are to be expected with this group, so it could be a big concern as the Bears defend some of the top offenses in the Big 12. You can't teach experience, and this squad really lacks it. I've been proven wrong on my record prediction before, so I'm definitely open to other takes that you may have, but I'm not sold on this unit just yet.

Foster Nicholas, Sports Writer

Record: 7-5
Why: I thought I was a hater, but a winning record seems oddly optimistic. It's hard to look past easier schedules across the Big 12 and a front-loaded schedule. For the Bears to be competitive this year, they need to be at least 4-2 after week six and I just don't buy it. This Baylor team is young and could be lacking on-field leadership if redshirt junior quarterback Blake Shapen isn't able to step up on the big stage. I love the depth in the running back and tight end rooms, but I'm struggling to see stars on the outside other than junior wideout Ketron Jackson, who, as a transfer, shouldn't have wide receiver No. 1 expectations. Overall, the offense seems very similar to the group put out last year and the success will hang on the shoulders of Shapen. If Baylor's quarterback play is a strength, this offense has all the firepower necessary to be a league leader, but yet again, the most important position on the field is the one I have the least confidence in.

However, despite what I think about the offense, head coach Dave Aranda is a defensive head coach who will live and die by what happens when the ball isn't in his hands. The front seven is once again loaded for this team, but a lacking secondary and inconsistent pass-rushing could leave a lot to be desired.

Ultimately, this team will be highly competitive and fight through tough games, but it's hard for me to envision Baylor pulling off as many upsets as would be necessary to sneak into the Big 12 Championship. Football season is back, but the Bears may not be back in contention for the national spotlight.

Jackson Posey, Sports Writer

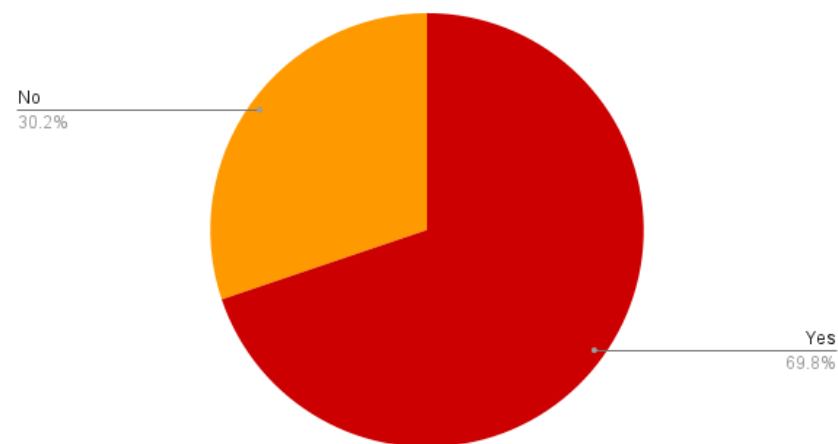
Record: 8-4
Why: Baylor's football schedule is exceptionally easy this year. With eight home games, the Bears have plenty of opportunities to build momentum behind a somehow-improved rushing attack. Richard Reese and Dominic Richardson should provide the perfect thunder-and-lightning complement to one another out of the backfield, and another year of experience under Blake Shapen's belt can only make the offense run more smoothly.

It is a front-loaded schedule, with early games against Utah and Texas, but the seas get a lot smoother after that. A three-game run against Cincinnati, Iowa State and Houston should provide the Bears a much-needed midseason boost before traveling to Manhattan, Kansas and Fort Worth.

The big thing to look forward to is a potentially revamped defense, which brought in a ton of new talent under new defensive coordinator Matt Powledge. Leading that charge will be Mike Smith Jr, a Liberty transfer with a knack for sniffing out rushers in the backfield. If he gets free reign to rove, expect to see a lot of slow-developing runs blown up ahead of schedule.

There's a lot of excitement offensively, too, with a number of new weapons - Richardson and wide receiver Ketron Jackson among them - coming in to buff up the skill positions. With what should be an improved offense and defense, Baylor's absolute floor this season is 6-6. If they're worse than that, I've publicly committed to eating a raw onion live on stream. Coach Aranda ... please don't let me down.

Are students sad to see Texas and Oklahoma leave?



Has conference realignment been good or bad?

