BAYLOR BEARS

Big 12 Conference

Baylor Ready to Get Back to Business

After winning the Big 12 Championship in 2021, Baylor entered 2022 with sky high expectations and many picked the Bears to repeat as champions. The schedule was littered with challenges and after a double overtime loss to BYU and a defeat at the hands of #9 Oklahoma State, the Baylor's playoff hopes were dashed in the first five weeks of the season. A 6-3 start was soured by three straight losses (Kansas State, TCU, and Texas) who were all ranked in the top 25 and Air Force had their way against the Bears in the Armed Forces Bowl. Despite the four game losing streak to end the season, Baylor appears to have shaken off the cobwebs and could be a contender in a Big 12 conference that is there for the taking.

For the second straight season, the Bears offense was dynamic and well-balanced even with some inconsistencies at quarterback. **Blake Shapen** is back at quarterback after throwing for 18 touchdowns and 10 interceptions, finishing with a total of 2,790 yards and a QBR of 137.7. He was pushed in spring camp by Northern Arizona transfer **RJ Martinez** and Mississippi State transfer **Sawyer Robertson** but ultimately retained his starting job. His favorite target, **Monaray Baldwin,** is back after leading the team with 33 catches, 565 yards, and 4 touchdowns. If Baldwin can churn out more 100-yard games like he had against Oklahoma State and TCU he'll be even more dangerous. He should also be featured even more on kick and punt returns. **Josh Cameron** added 386 yards on 28 catches and **Citron Jackson** joins the receiver unit from Arkansas.

Richard Reese was a breakout player for the Bears at running back. As a freshman, he ran for nearly 1,000 yards and was named the Big 12's Offensive Freshman of the Year. Look for offensive coordinator Jeff Grimes to use him in the passing game more this season. In addition to the talented Reese, Dave Aranda bolstered the running back room by bringing in **Dominic Richardson** who led Oklahoma State with 543 yards. Add in **Qualan Jones**' 462 yards and 7 touchdowns and you're looking at one of the best units in the conference. The ground game should be strong but much will be determined by how quickly Baylor can recover from losing several stars on the offensive line. Losing a pair of all-Americans is no small concern. **Clark Barrington** joins the Bears from BYU where he started 40 games over four seasons. **Tate Williams** and **Gavin Byers** both played the majority of the season but the list of those experienced on the line pretty much ends with the three players listed here.

The defense that was so dominant in 2021, holding opponents to just 18.3 points per game, had just six starters back and allowed 26.8 in 2022. This year only five starters return and four of the top six tacklers are gone but Aranda is a great defensive mind and I give him the benefit of the doubt when it comes to rebuilding this unit. **Gabe Hall** and **Garmon Randolph** both added 4.5 sacks last season. Both players have great size (6'6" and 6'7", respectfully) and will pace the Baylor pash rush again in 2023. Baylor will need to improve upon the 24 sacks they recorded last year. **Devin Lemear** will lead the secondary after picking off two passes and being named to the All-Big-12 Honorable Mention team. Utah State's **Ajani Carter** will add depth at corner and **Bryson Jackson** plays the safety/linebacker hybrid position and added 5.5 tackles for loss.

The Bottom Line: Will the Bears be back as true contenders in the Big 12? We'll found out quickly as Baylor faces Utah and Texas at home within the first four weeks of the season. Aranda's team went just 3-3 at McLane Stadium and saw their eight-game home winning streak come to an end against Oklahoma State. The Bears do face three of the four new members to the conference and they avoid Oklahoma. Back-to-back road games against Kansas State and TCU in November will be a key stretch if Baylor is in the mix to reach the Big 12 Championship game in Dallas for the second time in just three seasons. I fear that there is too much inexperience throughout the roster to truly compete for a conference title but Aranda and Baylor have certainly proved the doubters wrong in the past. This is still a quality team that could through the Big 12 into chaos with an upset or two.

Projection: 8-4 (7th in Big 12)

BAYLOR BIO

National Championships - **0**

XO

XO

Big 12 Championships: **3**
(Last: **2021**)

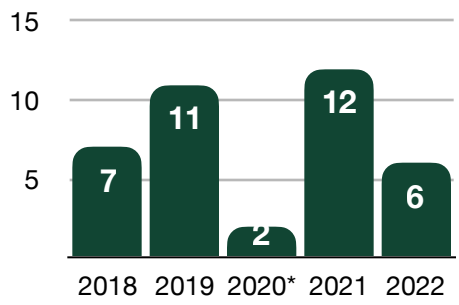
Location: **Waco, TX**

All-Time Record: **615-584-40**

2022 Results: **6-7**
Lost Armed Forces Bowl

Head Coach: **Dave Aranda**
4th Year (20-16)

5-YEAR WIN TREND



McLane Stadium (45,140)

2022 Statistics

Points Scored	Rush Yards	Pass Yards	Turnover Margin
32.2	182.4	231.5	+2
39th in FBS	43rd in FBS	69th in FBS	T-54th in FBS

Points Allowed	Rush YDS Allowed	Pass YDS Allowed
26.8	148.2	222.8
68th in FBS	62nd in FBS	62nd in FBS

2023 Baylor Schedule		
Week	**Date**	**Team**
1	Sat, Sept 2	vs. Texas State
2	Sat, Sept 9	vs. Utah
3	Sat, Sept 16	vs. Long Island
4	Sat, Sept 23	**vs. Texas**
5	Sat, Sept 30	**@ UCF**
6	Sat, Oct 7	**vs. Texas Tech**
7	Bye Week	
8	Sat, Oct 21	**@ Cincinnati**
9	Sat, Oct 28	**vs. Iowa State**
10	Sat, Nov 4	**vs. Houston**
11	Sat, Nov 11	**@ Kansas State**
12	Sat, Nov 18	**@ TCU**
13	Sat, Nov 25	**vs. West Virginia**

Conference Games in Bold

KEY GAMES

Sat, Sept 9: vs. Utah - The Bears catch the Utes at home a week following Utah's big showdown against the Florida Gators. If Baylor can take advantage of a potentially run down opponent they can claim a statement win in week two and take a 3-0 record into a the Big 12 opener against Texas.

Sat, Sept 23: vs. Texas - The home team has won the last five games in the series. That could bode well for Baylor and the fans in McLane will make an impact.

Sat, Nov 18: @ TCU - The Bears nearly ruined TCU's perfect regular season last year and the last two meetings have been decided by a combined three points. Can Baylor enact their revenge on the Horned Frogs on the road?

KEY PLAYERS

Blake Shapen - QB

In 2021 Shapen stepped in for an injured Garry Bohanon and guided the Bears to a win over Texas Tech in the regular season finale and then put together a nearly flawless performance in the Big 12 title game. Expectations were lofty for Shapen and the result was a bit of a mixed bag. He's still very talented with a big arm and the weapons around him will be arguably be better than last season, so this could be his best season yet.

Richard Reese - RB

Reese was extremely impressive as a freshman. He was just 28 yards shy of 1,000 and scampered into the end zone 14 times. His two games against Kansas and Texas Tech were particularly notable where he ran for a combined 334 yards and 5 touchdowns and caught 5 passes for 38 yards. He slowed down a bit towards the end of the season but as long as the O-line can block effectively, he'll be dominant.

2022 RESULTS (6-7)

Albany (W 69-10)
@ BYU (L 20-26)
Texas State (W 42-7)
@ Iowa State (W 31-24)
Oklahoma State (L 25-36)
@ West Virginia (L 40-43)
Kansas (W 35-23)
@ Texas Tech (W 45-17)
@ Oklahoma (W 38-35)
Kansas State (L 3-31)
TCU (L 28-29)
@ Texas (L 27-38)
Air Force (L 15-30)

BAYLOR

RECRUITING

2023 Class Ranking

34th

(Via 24/7 Sports)