



Baylor Head Coach Video Conference December 27, 2021



COACH ARANDA: It's good to see you guys. I hope everyone had a Merry Christmas. I know for us it was fun to have some time off and to be with family and to enjoy the day.

Prior to that, the prep for practice has been eventful and strong. I feel good going into this last week of where the team is at, had seven days prior to this, seven practices. So one through three really made that kind of about us, 1s-versus-1s competition, O versus D, two-minute red zone competing, one-on-one throughout the day, running backs, linebackers, O-line, D-line, pass rush.

And then getting into last week, four through seven was kind of a workweek, were the meat and potatoes for the game plan. And so we went through a Thursday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and again Thursday practice and had some good work there.

And then this, we're now left with our final week of prep. And so we're going to have a normal Monday today. The guys will be able to have some unit-teach walk-through work and then some two-minute full-speed work at the end. I think the practices have been good. Guys are in good spirits. It's been efficient, and it's been emotional. They're excited about the opportunity.

Q. How is Gerry Bohanon progressing, and do you expect him to start? And also Blake Shapen, how have you seen him progress since getting the two big starts?

COACH ARANDA: So Blake has not been participating. Blake is still recovering from a shoulder injury; so we're not anticipating having Blake.

I think you look at -- as I step back from just the specifics of your question just for a minute, and you just look at just the ups and downs that you go through with this sport. And so you look at a guy like Gerry who put in all this work and no one really recognizes it, or maybe opportunities are hard to come by. And he gets his opportunity, makes the most of it, and then really kind of takes control of the team and gets his team right up to a point and then gets injured -- injured straining and striving for extra yardage.

And then you look at Blake coming in, doing all this work, not being looked at, maybe an argument could be made not having a bunch of opportunities, and then has an opportunity, makes the most of it, has a huge game there at the end.

You look at his emotions. You look at Gerry's emotions of being a team leader and working to get to a certain point and then seeing another guy follow through with it and then still being the team leader that's going to embrace and celebrate that victory and that performance. And then you look at all of that and flip it again. You know? And so it's just crazy.

I applaud both Gerry and Blake just for how they've handled it and the type of teammates that they are, the model of what a teammate should be. And so just way proud of them.



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Proud of [Coach] Shawn [Bell] for his ability to model all that as well. But Gerry's been good. He's been throwing the ball better and better. I think towards the end of the week he was at his best. Anticipating him to just take off from there. I think confidence-wise, very strong, able to run, open up, and do all the things that we've been accustomed to seeing him do. So excited for him and his opportunity.

Q. I was just wondering what have y'all been doing the last couple weeks just now that COVID has sort of reared its head again with all of these bowl games. What did y'all all do over Christmas break to kind of mitigate the spread? And how is y'all's team doing with all of that?

COACH ARANDA: We're following the protocols, really, that we've had since the beginning of the year. And I think it has served us well up to this point, and I think you could argue that things are intensifying on the COVID front. Certainly, in the landscape of football you can see it with the cancellations and all of it.

But I know, specifically addressing Christmas, I think that was a topic of we could restrict -- or ask to restrict our people going home and seeing their people and could put this layer on it or put this criteria to have to be able to see this person and do all these things, and decided not to do that just with a focus on our people and their relationships and how tight they are with their families.

Our vaccination rate is very high on the team. And I just think, for us, our superpower, if there is one, is relationships. It's people. It's family. It's really caring about others. And I think for us to have Christmas with our families, I think, is really important.

And so our guys all checked in last night. And so we got everybody back on time. And we're excited, man, to get another week in, really the last time here for this team to be together. And so I feel like we're in a good spot for that and moving forward with the precautions that we've taken.

Q. What went into the decision-making process on delaying coming to the Sugar Bowl, to New Orleans? Also, how does that affect your preparations for the good, the bad, and just along that line?

COACH ARANDA: I think it was just the ability to limit the opportunity that there is there just in the surrounding area of getting sick. So the less time we're there, the less time there is to either have to manage if it's a lockdown-type situation or the less time to have to try to maneuver through a daily schedule and not get sick. So it allowed the best opportunity to play the game healthy.

And so I think it's -- I think Ole Miss is in the same boat. And so I just think, for us, it was -- after going through a lot of back-and-forth and having talked with some leaders of our team, wanting the full bowl experience, wanting all the pageantry that comes with a great bowl game, wanting that. And then just as the talks kind of continued right prior to Christmas, it just became apparent that that was not in our best interest to do if we wanted to play this game healthy. And so we made that move.



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Q. You've obviously been involved in a lot of different bowl games at the places you've been. What is your approach to bowl games in terms of business trip, fun, mixing that, and maybe even in terms of getting ready for spring ball and next year?

COACH ARANDA: I think the bowl gives us an opportunity to show who we are. I think there is a stage there. There is a platform that we can -- whether it's people we interact with at the hotel, it's the people that are on our plane, it's the fans that are coming to see us, it's all the people that are going to be watching on TV, it's going to be an introduction to Baylor University. It's going to be an introduction to Baylor football and then to all of our last names in terms of not so much what we do, but how we do it and in terms of what drives us. I think that comes out. And so we want to put our best foot forward in regards to that.

And I think to finish this game the way that we started this season with being really true to ourselves and, in most critical, tough situations, being our best authentic selves. And so we want to put that on display.

Q. How would it feel to be back in the Superdome again? And, two, can you talk about how much life has changed since January of 2020 for you.

COACH ARANDA: That's a good question. It's going to be good to be in the Superdome. I know we're expecting it to be loud. We've been working on a silent count and noise cadence and everything, really, throughout this whole prep. And so we're anticipating a pretty lively environment there, and rightfully so. So I think that will be exciting to play in.

And then for me, a lot has changed. Yeah, I think probably the last time I was in that stadium, I think life was probably simpler. I think it was probably -- I think I could probably control as much as I could control at that point with the focus being on football. And now with less football and more people, I've grown immeasurably and still aiming to grow.

I think in that time, going back, probably the faults that I would see in other people, I probably kept it there. I think now I see the faults really in me in terms of what other people bring up. And so I think there's a fair amount like that. And I'm thankful for everybody here. And, in the position that I'm in and the people that I'm around, for trying to get me better.

Q. Just in terms of that uptick in COVID and it seems like every day you see a bowl game getting canceled or a team dropping out, how much -- when you guys see that around you, are there those concerns and those "Okay. Who's going to be next?" and those kinds of things while also you're trying to prepare for Ole Miss on Saturday?

COACH ARANDA: I think when we're in -- I'd almost see that in two different contexts. I think one would be prior to the Christmas break, when you're in kind of the prep or the grind for a game, I think it's kind of a blip on the screen as you are focusing on what's -- we talk about one step at a time, one drill at a time, one period at a time, or one meeting at a time. And so as you're kind of taking that



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approach, there's kind of a blip on the screen of this or that. And so it doesn't really affect you too much because you're so -- your eyes are forward in that.

But it is a different context when you're home with the family and a game that you're aiming to watch gets canceled or you're kind of full off of a really good meal and then here comes another thing. It kind of hits you different, really. And so I think part of today with our kids being back is to get out of one context which they've been in the last couple days and get them fully into the other where we've got work to do. Let's get to work.

Q. With Blake [Shapen] being out, how has Kyron Drones looked and how comfortable are you with him if he has to get in the bowl game? And what has it been like prepping for Matt Corral, Ole Miss's quarterback?

COACH ARANDA: I feel really good about Kyron. He has really taken to the added responsibility and reps, has attacked it, has not shied from it one bit. I think his work ethic has always been one of his better attributes, but I think it really stands out now.

Excited about his progress and his potential for sure. I think, as it relates to this Saturday, I think we've got a really good game plan for him. It includes a lot of the things that we're doing with Gerry [Bohanon], but then there are a few specific things just for him if he were to find himself with a bunch of time on his hands there.

And then I think, for Matt Corral, I think he's a guy that -- surely he's the engine for them. I see everything kind of going through him. He has a great awareness and patience in the pocket and can find guys that are clearly open, can thread the needle on one-on-one shots on the outside. When the rush is divided and conquered, can get out and scramble and make plays happen, which, for us, the majority of the year has been a struggle.

But on top of all of those things, the thing you see about him is that he's a winner, and he does not take to failure and he does not take to not succeed. And so you can see that fight in him, and that bleeds through to his team. And so what a battle we've got ahead of us.

Q. I know you kind of talked about it on the Coach's show about how Ole Miss's defense kind of plays the bend-but-don't-break style of defense. How key will it be offensively to just capitalize on any red zone opportunities that you get?

COACH ARANDA: I think that's a huge part of the game. I think, just looking at it from Ole Miss's perspective, if I'm them and I'm looking at -- I think we can go even further. If I'm them looking at our defense, I'm seeing these big D linemen that we got and knock back and defend the run and all of it.

I'm sure on their side of it, they're saying, "Well, that's great. How does that look after eight plays under a minute of going left and right, left and right, left and right?"



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And so I think knowing that that's coming, the work and the prep that it takes to be at our best under that type of circumstance and pressure, I think is really kind of everything on that side of it, on defense.

And then I think for our offense, if I'm Ole Miss, I'm looking at us and just how we've been able to move the ball from 20 to 20 pretty strong these last couple games but have not been as successful in finishing those drives to touchdowns. And so I'm looking at -- if I'm Ole Miss, I'm looking at us and how that's a strength and how they can double down on all of it.

So I just think, for us, the ability to spend time there, to spend time executing drives to where we don't create penalties and we're not battling two people to get down there. And then once we are there, to use their advantages against them and make it a disadvantage for them or an advantage for us, either by play selection or by angles or by new wrinkles, I think are just way key. And so a huge part of the game, in my opinion, is finishing out drives.

JOHN SUDSBURY: Thank you very much for your time this morning, Coach. We really appreciate it. Look forward to seeing you in New Orleans in a couple of days.