



## Baylor Head Coach Video Conference

December 31, 2021



**COACH ARANDA:** So blessed and appreciative to be here at this great bowl game with the great people that are here working the game. And just have been so impressed just with the time that we've been here, with just being welcomed and being seen.

I just feel like the team is thankful for the opportunity to be on this stage and have continued to work hard to take advantage of this opportunity. I've been by this [Caesars] Superdome so many times whether it's recruiting or it's heading into downtown for a bite to eat. And so just to be back brings back memories. And to have the opportunity to play in this game is just so cool.

And I'm very appreciative and blessed for it. With that, I'll take any questions you guys have got.

**Q. Just wanted to start out with when looking at the tape from Ole Miss's offense, what sticks out to you the most about their offense that could pose problems for you? And when it comes to Matt Corral, what do you see from him? And do you think he could be a good QB at the next level?**

**COACH ARANDA:** When I look at their offense, I see the success on the first play of the drive, the new-and-ten play.

So the study that we did with that would be if they -- if Ole Miss has four or more yards on that new-and-ten play, they're scoring touchdowns 50% of the time in those drives. They're scoring, period, 60-some percent of the time. If that new-and-ten play goes for three or less yards, they're scoring 20-some percent of the time. They're scoring touchdowns, like, 15% of the time.

And so it just shows that once they get going, it's very hard to stop with the tempo and the play selection and their athletes in space. And so there is some more time allotted for us, specifically for this game as a defense to adjust for that and to practice that. And we're hoping that that helps.

I think the ability to keep it simple so that we can line up and have some success on our one-and-ones is really what it's going to come down to.

When I look at Matt Corral, I just see a competitor. I see a winner. I see someone who wills his team. In today's age, a guy his caliber, staying with it, and playing in this game, I think, speaks a lot.

And so excited to be able to see him. Just love college football and love competitors and I think he's a great one.

**Q. What's it been like to be coaching inside a bubble this week? And also do you expect anybody to miss the game due to COVID issues?**

**COACH ARANDA:** Appreciate that. So we have talked from the very beginning of the prep of the most prepared, the least distracted. And looking back at teams that are successful in bowl games, you've got the added time to prepare and take an advantage of that. Say, you're playing a triple-option offense



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or you're playing a three-three-five multiple blitz offense -- or defense rather, and whereas you normally have a week to prepare for it, you've got more than that. And so the advantage can go to those that are most prepared.

And then I think you're the least distracted. Whether it's guys that are looking for what's going on that particular night or it's guys that are looking for "after this game I'm out, I'm going to the pros" or nowadays it's "after this game I'm out and I'm in the portal" or whatever it is. There's just distractions abound.

And I think coaches are a part of that, right? Coaches moving. I had a coach all year and now he's gone. Now who's this guy? And so the distractions at this time are just so paramount.

So most prepared, least distracted gives you the best chance to win in the bowl game. I think there's a really -- another strong layer just with where are we at with COVID and the standards that we're embracing.

And our team's been great about it. And I think everything we've asked our guys to do throughout this year, they've been great about. And this is just another thing.

So I feel like we're in great shape. I don't anticipate right now us missing anyone going into this game.

**Q. Coach, just in terms of I know earlier in the week you had mentioned that Gerry [Bohannon] was progressing and looking better and better and back to his old self. In that same vein, is there a definitive yes or no as to whether or not he'll be starting tomorrow?**

**COACH ARANDA:** Appreciate the question. Gerry will start. When we started the practice prep for this game, it was the first time really he has opened up, the first time he was transferring weight. And I think so with that came some adjustments that he had to make because he was maybe trying to protect or maybe not sure or he had to relearn kind of the correct fundamentals and all of it. So there is some of that. Really, that was the first week, though. I think since then it's just progressed.

And last week really had a great week. And then this week, it's like we're in week 5 or week 6. It's like he never left.

And yesterday was just way impressive. He's been opening up, running full speed, showing bursts, showing change direction, making throws from one hash to the far sideline. So excited for him. There's a look in his eye, and I know his heart's on fire, too. So excited for his opportunity, and I know he's ready for it.

**Q. I think you touched on this loosely here, but regarding opt-outs for these games, what has allowed you guys to remain intact? And would you be in favor of some type of structure that kind of really encouraged players or held them more accountable to play in these bowl games?**



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**COACH ARANDA:** That's a good question. I appreciate that. I think for us, it starts all the way back with just recruiting and finding and -- I guess, first of all, just knowing the type of program that you want to be and finding kids that align with that program, and parents as well.

And then I think talking your values and more importantly living out your values. And then when you get your kids on campus, it's really spend the time to get to know them.

And I just feel like there's been programs I've been in and staffs I've been on where it's -- and I've been a part and parcel of this, too. So there's been a for-sure growth just with me of where you can just be so focused on ball and so focused on the wins and losses that you don't really see, hear, or value the people that are doing it for you. And I think that leads to bad things.

And so I think to keep the focus on the people and to see your people and to do your best to hear them out is what we try to do and I know a lot of folks try to do.

I think even with that being said, you've got family members. You've got third parties that maybe if there's a reality on the field, there's a different version of it that they're seeing and so then that's coming into play. So I think it's a difficult situation.

I think all that we can do is really try to get a right fit for who we are and get to know your people, continue to see them in the ups and downs and appreciate them because it's really a players' game.

**Q. Obviously Ole Miss's offense puts a little stress on your defense. Does it also put a little stress on the offense to keep up and answer?**

**COACH ARANDA:** That's a good question. Your question is really, I see it as just so different -- such a difference in styles.

So I think when I -- if I were to put your question that way, I think it's just very important for us to be us and for us to not get out of our lane of what we do well.

And so I think offensively for us, to move the ball and run the ball, establish line of scrimmage, to get the eighth and ninth guy involved in the box so that there are opportunities for pass plays behind them, to use movement in the pocket and get our quarterback out on the perimeter where there's a run or throw option.

And then I think the ability to use motion, shifts to try to get the looks or the adjustments that we want, I think those things will lead to -- those are kind of process things that I think will lead to the results or the outcome that we're hoping for. But we have to execute that stuff well, and we really can't get outside of that lane.



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We're going to have to score in the red zone. I think that's going to be a huge piece. A couple weeks back when we're really working and kind of humming right on offense, we were finishing drives and scoring touchdowns.

And I think these past couple of weeks there's been a lot of movement from 2020, and we've got to be able to close the deal. And I think that goes with process and execution as well.

**Q. After this recent wave of realignment, does this game mean more as a Big 12-versus-SEC game? Do you feel any extra pressure because of that to represent the conference well?**

**COACH ARANDA:** Appreciate the question. Specifically I don't.

Now, I can see for people that may be associated with Baylor or our league, I could see that view. And I can understand that. I just think for us, just that whole thing has got nothing to do really with, like, what's going to happen today, that's going to put us in the best situation to play our best tomorrow night.

And so it's a good question, though. I can see all of that. Some of that is stuff to think about after the game maybe, or hopefully. But I think in the lead-up to the game, that would be looked at as a distraction.

**Q. How key is a guy like Jalen Pitre in this game tomorrow in containing such a dynamic quarterback in Matt Corral?**

**COACH ARANDA:** That's a good question. When I think of Jalen, I think of when he first got here to just all the change. You think about all the change that Jalen has seen and the uncertainty. Jalen could write a book on uncertainty.

And the coaches that have come and gone, it would be so easy for Jalen to hear something and -- from a coach and just say, "That's coach speak, man. I'm going to do my thing. I'm going to believe my stuff."

And so Jalen is just a very special kid, man. For him to trust and for him to align with us and to be a leader of us, there is a lot in that because he's seen it all. So I know this game means a lot for him.

And Ron Roberts has a great plan and he is -- Jalen's right in the center of it. I think Ole Miss is a really good stretch team. They get to the perimeter and are effective, and their quarterback is effective when he's out of the pocket throwing. And so Jalen's going to be right in the middle of all of that. I know he's itching to be.

**Q. Blake Shapen shows up in the biggest way in that championship game. How impressed are you with his athleticism and even knowing he was the number one shortstop coming out of Louisiana, he can play baseball and football?**



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**COACH ARANDA:** Very impressed with Blake. I remember on the recruiting visit there at a school and just meeting with his principal and his teachers and his coaches I've known for a while and just how they would speak on Blake and just who he was, how he treated people, how he handled adversity, what his heart was like.

And then I remember going to his -- visiting with his parents at their house. And I want to say it was -- we were getting ready for Christmas, and they had all these Christmas ornaments and decorations in the house and just sitting there and talking about Blake and talking about just what he's gone through to become the person that he's becoming and just his growth and his willingness to learn and grow more and just his heart.

And all of that really is the foundation for the glimpse that we all saw in this particular game you bring up. I think there's just -- there's so much more. And I think it's a reason why he can go through the year like he's gone through without really playing a lot.

And when his opportunity comes, he can ascend and put on the performances that he did. And it's the reason why he can handle all of this right now, to have a game like he had and now to not be playing and to not be the guy, to be able to sit and digest it and handle it.

So just way excited for him, man. I think athletically, like you mentioned, there's a lot there. There's a lot more inside. And so the best is yet to come for him.

**Q. We saw [Drew] Estrada get off the plane in a boot. Can you tell us what's going on with him? And will he be available to play in the game?**

**COACH ARANDA:** Yes, he will be available. I think he is still -- he's had an injury there on his ankle or his foot, rather, for a while. And he's been able to play through it.

And I think he played the last couple of games with this, and I think any time that's a rest time, he'll get in the boot just to kind of help with all of it, put him in the best position possible to play.

And so we fully expect him to play. Every practice that we've had he's been rolling full speed, making full speed cuts. So it's just been kind of a part of his process for a couple of weeks now. So excited for him. He's been looking good.