Baylor Football Head Coach Dave Aranda
2020 National Signing Day Press Conference
Feb. 5, 2020

***Opening Statement***
“I’m so blessed to have all the help of the university and the campus in this recruiting process. I can’t tell you how many times we’ve been having kids on campus and parents and families that come tour inside and talk about the people here, how they are treated, the welcome that they have gotten, and the feeling of family they have. So, I want to say thank you to the Baylor campus. I want to say thank you, especially to Coach Rodriguez and the baseball staff for their help with Blake Shapen. When I think of family and I think of the value in helping others, I think that feeling and attitude really came out and just for myself being new and some of our staff being new, that was a feeling that I think was real and it helped us in the recruiting process here to finish strong. I’m so proud of our staff for putting together a recruiting class, we were able to bring in five guys. Mike Harris from Alabama, I remember Mike from back when I was at LSU. We had him at camp and were always impressed with his tape. Mike is going to have the ability to play nickel, safety, blitz, cover, and set edges. He is an explosive athlete and I’m so excited to see what we can do with Mike. He is from a great program there in Alabama, from a super family, we were able to visit with them and connect and excited what the future holds for Mike. Micah Mazzccua from St. Frances Academy, I have known about Micah for a while. I think when I first met Micah here, I was here for less than 24 hours and so I was very excited to build a connection with Micah and his ability to play offensive guard for us and fill those interior spots. He can pull, he can base, base block with the best of them, and finish people. He can jump set and cover people up. Chateau Reed from Lawton, Oklahoma is such a raw and lanky athlete. A guy that has a lot of flexibility. We are looking at him at safety, he has played multiple positions. What a super family. We really enjoyed having his family down this past weekend, and I think his best playing days are surely ahead of him. I’m looking forward to utilizing him in the center field, as well as the deep half. I think there is a lot of potential for him to make plays in those spots. Blake Shapen. Right away in sitting down with our staff and reviewing our quarterback prospects and recognizing that we need to bring in a quarterback in this class, we identified Blake right away and was able to see just the intangibles such as toughness, smart, dependable, instinctive, able to create. He is also a shortstop and when he plays short stop while he is playing quarterback I think is when he really jumps off the screen. So, we are able to say, ‘that’s our guy,’ and it was a full effort to get him. Coach Fedora was fired up to be a part of that and I know that Shawn [Bell] was a big part of that as well. I’m very happy to connect with Blake and his family and go back to Louisiana and be able to pull him. I thought there was great competition there at the end. Alfahiym Walcott. Al was here with his family. Al is coming to us from Butler Community College. His length, his size and speed ratio, his play-making ability. He can play corner; he can play safety. There are times that he could be down in the box and be back in the half at the middle of the field. His flexibility, again, allows for us to have a great tool in terms of attacking with our back end. So very excited to have Al and what he brings.”

***On the tweet about visiting 270 Texas high schools in 10 days and the reception received…***

“It was great reception. The power of the Texas High School Coaches Association, for me that was my first stop. I tell them this when I meet with them, outside my family, I don’t know if there are people I want to be around more than high school coaches and just their love of kids and their love of the game and the fellowship that they have. Right away you can feel that, and it feels good to be a part of that. I credit the Texas High School Coaches Association with their ability to try and get the state to go straight-line recruiting. I think from my perspective, being in other parts of the country where that is not being looked at, I wish more people would do it how Texas does it. Having the opportunity to meet with coaches and see some of the top talent out in the state, see some of the kids coming up here in the years to come was a benefit to us. So, we will get it started quickly and I’m excited about that start.”

***On recruiting Blake [Shapen] as a two-sport guy and the willingness to recruit two-sport guys in the future…***

“Absolutely, I think the success with that has been strong, just in my past. What I love about that, No. 1, is just the team effort in recruiting. And then No. 2, just the athletic potential for someone that plays two sports and just the dedication and the pure athleticism it takes. So, that’s a win-win for us. I’m so proud and happy to be associated with Coach Rodriguez (Baylor baseball coach Steve Rodriguez) and his staff. They really hit it out of the park and were a big, big help in landing Blake [Shapen].”

***On if there was a need to re-recruit the 12 players signed in December, since there was a coaching change after they signed with Baylor…***

“There was. We were able to bring quite a few of them back on campus. There were a few that came this last weekend. Throughout the state recruiting, in a lot of the schools that we visited, we would stop by and I would visit with families and we invited them to come on back. The NCAA has allowed in a coaching change that you can come again, if you have a visit that’s available. So, a lot of them took us up on that. It was great to connect, and for them to meet their coaches and for them to spend time with me. We definitely made an effort. I think that was a big point of emphasis just from the start.”

***On how unique the challenge was of having only three weeks to get this done after coaching for LSU in the national championship game…***

“A lot of the connections that the previous staff had made, we were able to build off of that, and just really off of their lists. There’s a few that when I came that were guys that I knew about. Mike [Harris] would be one of them, Blake [Shapen] would be another. But the majority of them were guys that we were on, that we had identified. Whenever there’s a change, there’s always going to be uncertainty and there’s always going to be questions. I credit Coach [Joey] McGuire, Coach [Shawn] Bell and Coach [David] Wetzel with quieting that down and certainly answering the questions that needed to be answered allowed us to move forward in a positive way.”

***On when you have such little time, what does that process look like when you’re trying to evaluate your roster and figure out what you need with those remaining spots…***

“You’re doing a lot of stuff in the car when you’re driving from spot to spot. So, in the car, you’re looking at trying to hire a staff, you’re looking at identifying needs, you’re looking at who’s available and who’s not, who’s open and who’s not. You’re trying to find leads to possible dates that are open for visits. In between, you’re visiting with coaches looking for the next class that’s coming up. So, a lot of it was done in the car as you’re driving. I know we had some good conversations in the car. Unfortunately, a lot of them were kind of listening to the business at hand. I think when stuff is coming at you fast, you’re working on all the daytime hours up until night.”

***On there being a big emphasis on filling the safety position, what does that do for the program moving forward having depth at that position…***

“It gives you flexibility, because there are some safeties that will grow into linebackers, there are some safeties that could play nickel [back]. So, two positions. And there’s some safeties that could be cover safeties, other safeties that could be back end, deep middle of the field or half-field safeties. A lot of those guys run really well, which allows you to build those units with really good speed. We had a shortage there, and I feel like we’ve addressed that. And I think that’s going to be a real strength for us moving forward.”

***On being at 17 signees, does that fill up the class or anything else specific you might still be looking for…***

“We’ve got a couple spots available. I think you’re always going to look at what comes our way transfer portal-wise. I think we’re going to keep our eyes open and our ears close to the ground, kind of see what comes of it. What we didn’t want to do in this phase of it was reach. I’m really proud of the guys, because we stayed true to that. We wanted people that fit the university, that fit what we believe in, that fit our standards, and have the ability to play at the level we’re at. And I thought we were able to identify those guys and get them. But moving forward, if a good player comes up that it’s in the right frame of mind with the skills on and off the field to fit here, we’re definitely open.”