**Baylor head coach Dave Aranda Weekly Press Conference**

**August 31, 2020**

***On the Baylor secondary…***

Immediately when I think about the secondary, I think of Jalen Pitre and (Jairon) McVea. I think of that star position. Jairon has really been able to cover well in the slot and be able to do zone concepts that we want for him to execute as well as the man principles, the man coverages that are so dependent on his technique. He’s covering the slot receiver, kind of their go-to guy. It’s been really exciting to see McVea play the way he has.

Then you’ve got Pitre who can bring in a blitzing aspect that can set edges against the run, that can cover as well. So I think that combination of Star athlete enables us to really be dynamic and really play into each other strengths. When I think of the secondary, I start there.

In terms of the back end, the safety position, it’s JT (Woods) or (Will) Williams, I think have a lot of length, a lot of range. Christian (Morgan) gives us an in the box safety. I think he’s improved his middle field range, coverage and vision. I think we’re still working on improving some more there.

The thing about the defense, the five DBs, there is an element of being position-less. There are certain strengths. We start and would like to end in those strength spots. The ability to be kind of be nameless and interchangeable in today’s game allows for quite a bit of hidden successes, and we’re looking for those in offenses that we face.

I think corner-wise, the length with Mark (Milton) and Kalon (Barnes), the length that they have and the speed that they have gives us the ability to press. That’s probably a change from the past is having that ability. Raleigh (Texada) gives us the ability to bail and play some zone concepts that he has in the past. I think press is something that he’s really attacked. I’m so encouraged just by his enthusiasm and his desire to learn something new and really improve. He’s one of my favorite guys to watch, just his speed and excitement, his want and his ability to grow and learn is very impressive. There’s a lot of positives there. Our offense has given us a fair amount to adjust to and have to cover. Our offensive skill receivers, definitely where there are isolations, they test us. So I’m proud with our secondary’s movement. There’s more improving to do.

***On special teams…***

With special teams, we want our best players contributing and playing and taking ownership of special teams. So I’m really proud of Matt Powledge and what’s he’s been able to do there with the time we’ve had going back to Zoom meetings. Matt has some really good catch phrases and themes. We’re starting and breaking meetings with these things. Our guys have really taken to it. It’s important, special teams is, it’s the first play of the game. I think for example if you watch field goal block, and I think when you watch that on Saturday, you watch the effort, you watch the intensity, you watch the intent, that tells you a lot about your team. Somebody just scored and that group’s out on the field, and what do they look like. How do they approach this, how do they respond? So I think it’s very much an attitude and it’s very much contagious. I think Matt’s done a great job with that.

***On Baylor’s return game…***

We’re still in the process of trying to narrow that down. These last two scrimmages have been good glimpses into what we want to be. I think this week right here the thought is to continue to get the work that we need, so that going into the week of the 12th we are as settled as much as we can be. I think there’s some freshmen who are in some of these spots. We’re looking at them. I think it’s very open right now in terms of who those are. John Lovett and (Trestan) Ebner have been involved. I think they bring some experience to that, but we’re looking at everybody to see kind of where this goes. Not only starting on the 12th, but to see where it could possibly go the rest of the season.

I think you look at special teams as a game changer. We certainly look at it that way. It changes games. The importance of it, the pride that goes into it, having playmakers on offense and defense in it. I think the coaches’ devotion to it, the study of it, and for me the constant preaching of how important it is. Getting good vs. good work throughout the week and so that the speed and tempo are there when the ball is kicked off on Saturday. But I think special teams just being in games as much as we want to score and as much as we want to score a lot. My favorite games are the low-scoring games where the field position is so critical that if hey we get a three-and-out here and we pin them deep, and then the offense gets the ball at this yard line and we can matriculate the ball down and get in position to make this kick, and we can pin them deep again and go three-and-out. Those things just winning games like that when you’re facing a really strong adversary, and the special teams come out on top, those are really rewarding and we’re building our team to win those types of games.

***On Jalen Pitre and his commitment to program…***

It says a lot. I’m very excited about Jalen (Pitre). When I hear more about him, ‘Hey, Jalen in practice did this.’ ‘Jalen in meetings said that.’ I learn how he sees the game and I learn his values. For Jalen to be out in front of our team and our defense I think speaks to the values that our defense holds. So to get him out in front more and to put him in a position to be successful, I think as coaches, Jalen makes it easy on us.

***On his plans to monitor games this weekend…***

That’s a good point. I plan on doing that. I was able to watch the game here just recently that was on TV. I feel like you’re watching that thing: ‘Oh, are their masks on? Are they distanced?’ You’re so used to that, so you can’t help but think that when you’re watching those things. It was really cool to see just how much fun they were having, the coaches and the players, and it was just great to see football again. But, it does look different. So, I was aiming to do that, was to call around and kind of get some of these guys who are playing, their take on how it went. And if they were to do it again, what they would do, because it is new. And for us to be on the same page that way I think is well-needed.

***On how this unique offseason affected his ability to connect with the team…***

I agree with that. That’s very good and very insightful. I think it has. I think just football in general, we were talking about this as a staff earlier that in past where you say, Hey, I’m going to blow this whistle, and guys were running here and running there. In the past, where it was hey, we’re going to do this, and it better look like this. I just feel like that’s not actually my personality, anyway, but I just think whether it’s COVID-19 or whether it’s striving to get social justice, I think if you look at those things, there’s a lot of questions, there’s a lot of listening, there’s a lot of listening to understand.

I think all of those things are appreciating the person over the player. And I can’t remember a season, particularly just for me, speaking for me, where that’s ever been the case more than the season. So, I appreciate that, and I appreciate our players’ openness and their willingness to let me in and our coaches in. I think of this as coaches, too. I think the person over the coach, the person over the player. And a lot of times as coaches, you don’t see that until you’re fired, until you’re out of a job. Your identity was as a coach: Coach this, coach that. And then you’re struggling to find the person that you’d like to be or at one time you were. So, the identity piece, and getting to know our people and investing in that has been much accelerated because of the time that we’re in. So, I appreciate that.

***On Big 12 Conference discussion regarding game cancelation criteria…***

That’s an interesting question. I think the talks that we’ve had, I think there’s been a bit of a break and I don’t know if there’s been a resolution yet. I think that’s still being worked out. I know for me, it would come down to the big people, the O-line and the D-line. If you get to a point where you’re O-Line is down or your D-line is down – the O-line particularly – there’s not a bunch of body types that you could put into that position and play it effectively.

Defensive line, like for us, there are packages where we can play with two D-linemen, we could play with one D-lineman at times. And depending on the offensive structure, there are things that you could do. With that being said, if that’s the baseline, then what you’re looking at is offensively let’s say it’s ‘11’ personnel. So, there is one back, there is one tight end and there’s three receivers. And you use certain offensive plays and there’s a certain system that you run.

Typically, in 2019 anyways, you would have ‘11’ personnel package and plays, and you’ve got ‘20’ personnel package and plays. And that’s two backs, no tight ends, three receivers, and you’re doing something there. And maybe there’s a ‘10’ personnel package and plays, which is one back, no tight ends and four receivers, and each of those would be different plays per those personnel packages.

‘Hey, this kid’s coming in, we’re going to get the ball to him. We’re going to do this, we’re going to do that.’ I think in my view of it, COVID-19 changes that. So now, it’s like, ‘Hey, we’ve got these different personnel systems.’ But somewhere there’s a baseline of ‘Hey, these are our plays, and regardless of who we’ve got in the game, we can run these plays.’ So, it’s not this personnel equals that, this personnel equals that. It’s like, ‘Hey, here’s these plays. And if we’ve got tight ends, we can be in ‘12’ personnel. If we don’t, we’re in ’10 personnel’ And so on and so forth. So, whatever we need to, we can put people out there and effectively play. And then defensively, we want to be in nickel and we want to use the STAR. But if we don’t, now we’ve got a linebacker. I would think like that, not necessarily the thinking of scholarship players. There are some others that maybe don’t think like that, so it will be interesting to see where that lands.