

FINISH.

Baylor has gone 9-3, its most successful campaign since 1986, but the team insists it isn't done yet. Here's a look at where the Bears have been and where they're going.



Heisman worthy

Quarterback Robert Griffin III makes a strong case for college football's most prestigious award

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Next stop, S.A.

Find out where to go before and after the Alamo Bowl

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Head coach Art Briles announces Baylor's acceptance to the 2011 Valero Alamo Bowl on Sunday at the Simpson Athletics Center. Baylor will play Washington at 8 p.m. Dec. 29 in San Antonio.

Going to San Antone: BU stays in Texas for bowl

By TYLER ALLEY
SPORTS EDITOR

It's not a BCS Bowl or the Cotton Bowl, but the Bears will take it. And they'll take it gladly.

Baylor accepted an invitation to play in the 2011 Valero Alamo Bowl at 8 p.m. on Dec. 29 at the Alamodome in San Antonio.

"I am very excited to accept our invitation to the Valero Alamo Bowl in San Antonio," head coach Art Briles said. "I am really familiar with San Antonio. It's a great city, great venue with the Alamodome. The thing that catches my eye, as I watched early in the year, is the attendance at some of UTSA's games — they had 56,000 people there. So that is really impressive. It shows me that they are football-crazy, football-hungry in San Antonio."

Baylor (9-3, 6-3 in Big 12) will play University of Washington (7-5), the No. 2 non-BCS Pac-12 team.

"What they have done over the last three years has been remarkable," Briles said. "I think they have gone 5-7, 7-6 and they are 7-5 this year, but prior to that they were 0-12. Coach (Steve) Sarkesian has certainly done an outstanding job. The thing that really caught my attention was what they did to Nebraska last year in the Holiday Bowl."

This is the second consecutive year for Baylor to go to a bowl game. Last year Baylor was headed into its first bowl in 16 years, but also coming in on a three-

game losing streak. This season, Baylor heads into the bowl riding a five-game winning streak. The offense is fresh off a 48-point showing against Texas, and the defense forced six turnovers.

"It's huge," junior quarterback Robert Griffin III said. "We are playing with a lot of confidence, defense especially. Our offense is putting up a lot of points and a lot of yards. If anybody could play with us right now, it would be a tough match up. We feel like if we go out and be us, then nobody can beat us."

Briles said the message since the beginning of the season was for Baylor to not be a "one-hit wonder" in terms of going to bowl games.

"That was a big deal last year getting in a bowl game at Baylor University," Briles said. "It's a big deal this year to get into a bowl game at Baylor University. There's a lot of teams out there in Division I-A football that would love to be where we are at right now, so we understand that and we don't take it for granted. What we want to do is seize the moment. We want to take advantage of this opportunity that we have worked for, and that's our main goal"

Some of the possible bowl scenarios for the Bears included games outside Texas, such as the Insight Bowl in Temp, Ariz. Briles said having the bowl in Texas is great for Baylor Nation.

"It's a definite plus for our fans," Briles said. "When you go through the season and you

become bowl eligible you like to share it with the people that helped you get there. That's the part I love about it. We get to share it with our team, but our team gets to share it with our fans."

More than three weeks will have passed between Baylor's last regular season game and its bowl game.

"I think it's a positive thing if anything just because, coming off the season, you're as beat up as you are physically. I think emotionally as well, you're just a little worn down from the stress of the season," senior inside linebacker Elliot Coffey said. "I think that the time off is good. We have a week off to recover here and then we start up practice pretty soon."

Students may purchase their tickets at the Bill Daniel Student Center Ticket Office from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Thursday to Friday for \$65.

Quick Hits

What: Valero Alamo Bowl

Who: Washington

Where: Alamodome, San Antonio

When: 8 p.m., Dec. 29

TV: ESPN

RG3's season earns trip to NYC

By KRISTA PIRTLE
SPORTS WRITER

He is one of three players in the history of the FBS with more than 10,000 yards passing and 2,000 yards rushing, graduated both high school and college early, competed in the Olympic Trials at the age of 17, is a finalist for the Manning Award, the Walter Camp Player of the Year Award, the Davey O'Brien National Quarterback Award and the Heisman trophy.

His name is Robert Griffin III and he is the quarterback at Baylor University.

Monday it was formally announced that Griffin had been invited to New York City for the Heisman ceremony, along with Wisconsin running back Montee Ball, Stanford quarterback Andrew Luck, LSU cornerback Tyrann Mathieu and Alabama running back Trent Richardson.

According to ESPN analyst Kirk Herbstreit, the name on the front of his jersey will keep him from the Heisman.

"He's from Baylor," Herbstreit said. "He's not going to win the Heisman."

Griffin disagrees, crediting the name on the front of his jersey more than the one on the back.

"It's not just about me, it's about all of Baylor Nation," Griffin said. "I don't know if you can say we deserve it, but it would definitely be warranted."

Originally, Griffin was planning on attending the University of Houston, but when he found out head coach Art Briles was leaving there to take the head coaching job at Baylor, he followed along.

"I knew he could run because I had some friends, high school track coaches, who were watching him run," Briles said. "That was the first thing that caught our eye. Then when he came to camp, I remember after we had gone through some drills throwing, telling the coaches hey we got to hide this guy. This guy is special. I was really excited when I saw him throw the football. You can teach somebody to throw and you can teach proper pocket etiquette and form, but I haven't ever seen a slow guy get fast."



MEAGAN DOWNING | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 10 quarterback Robert Griffin III deflects Texas players as he runs for a touchdown on Saturday at Floyd Casey Stadium. Baylor defeated Texas 48-24, finishing the season 9-3.

On the season, Griffin has accumulated 3,998 yards passing and 644 rushing, responsible for 45 touchdowns. He leads the nation with a 72.4 completion rate.

"I think we have the best quarterback in the nation," junior tight end Jerod Monk said. "He's phenomenal when throwing the ball around. He gets it to a lot of guys and there are opportunities to score. Just looking at the defense, he knows where to throw the ball, and he executes the offense really well. You don't see hardly anybody in the country throw the deep ball like him. It's amazing."

"It's not just about me, it's about all of Baylor nation. I don't know if you can say we deserve it, but it would definitely be warranted."

Robert Griffin III | Quarterback

The Baylor team, led by Griffin, stepped up this 2011 season. It all started with the upset over then No. 14 TCU 50-48. Another boost for Griffin's résumé is his role in Baylor's undefeated November, highlighted by Baylor stunning then No. 5 OU with a 45-38 victory, sealing by a last second 34-yard touchdown pass.

"He has the ability to make plays that no other quarterback can make," Wright said.

With both Luck and Richard-

son done with conference play, Griffin had one extra weekend to state his case for the Heisman on then national stage in Waco against a renowned program, the University of Texas.

"We don't plan on letting anyone win the Heisman against us," Texas linebacker Keenan Robinson said early in the week.

Griffin and the Bears had the opposite view on the game as Griffin hit Wright for a 59-yard touchdown pass the second play of the game.

"I think he is [worthy of the Heisman]," Robinson said after the game. "Tonight he showed that and played great against a great defense. He did his job. He scored 48 points on us, so I think he is."

Looking back, Briles acknowledges Griffin's Heisman moments, but said it is his efforts over the whole season that earned him a shot at the award.

"I think he's done enough this season to win a Heisman," Briles said after the Texas game. "I don't think it comes down to one day. I think it certainly helped him today without a doubt, but when I think you judge somebody, you judge them over the long run, not the short run. His long run has been very impressive this year."

By definition, the Heisman is awarded to the most outstanding college football player in America.

"He's the most dynamic player in the NCAA right now," running back Terrance Ganaway said. "Why wouldn't he win it?"

Analysis: Huskies will look to stop RG3, BU run game

By KRISTA PIRTLE
SPORTS WRITER

Washington travels 2,161 miles to the Alamo Bowl with facets Baylor has faced all year: a decent defense, a fiery quarterback whose rush game is non-existent and a strong running back.

Sophomore quarterback Keith Price's numbers pale in comparison to Baylor's Robert Griffin III; his ball placement and quick release, however, are similar to that of the Heisman candidate's. Price set a school record this season with 29 scoring passes.

Baylor can try to blitz him like

it did against the Sooners' Landry Jones; Price is squirmly, however, and can find a solid read while he scrambles.

This is where the Baylor secondary must step in and play lights out.

In the Bears' final conference game against Texas, coverages were blown and gaps were not filled. Baylor defensive coordinator Phil Bennett saw the problems and drew up a solution that paved the way for his defense to force six turnovers.

Price, however, is a more confident quarterback than Texas' Case McCoy and has no prob-

lem attacking over the top. Baylor safeties Mike Hicks and Sam Holl will need to be at their best to jump his reads and force him to run the ball himself.

Attacking the secondary will be key for the Huskies, but their rush game can prove just as destructive.

Junior tailback Chris Polk is 5'11" and weighs in at 222 pounds.

He and Baylor's senior running back Terrance Ganaway are neck and neck in statistics with Polk averaging 111.8 yards per game and Ganaway with 112.2.

Ganaway is more of a down-

hill runner, willing and eager to break through the gap the offensive line has created and then lower his shoulder to power an extra handful of yards.

Polk looks for the outside edge where the receivers can set up extra blocks for him.

The Huskies also have a play featuring Polk that resulted in touchdowns against both Arizona and Washington State. Two additional players are on the line of scrimmage while a pair of receivers overload on the right side of the ball.

Polk will either start on Price's left side or switch from the right

to the left as the play is being called.

Once the ball is snapped, the player on the far left end of the line blocks the right tackle on his outside shoulder allowing a flag route down the sideline for Polk, leaving him wide open to catch the ball and take it to the house.

The key defensive player in this set is the linebacker on the weak side; he cannot bite toward the middle because he will be beat on the outside.

Shutting down Polk will be key for Baylor. When Washington wants to line up in the wildcat formation, the Huskies favor

lining sophomore Jesse Callier in shotgun behind center to plow a handful of key yards.

As far as the Washington defense goes, it is about as mediocre as the Big 12's.

Baylor's wide receiver screen is an option but not the best bet with sophomore safety Sean Parker, who has a team-high four interceptions on the season.

The Bears can rotate between running the game clock and firing from the hurry-up.

The more time Robert Griffin III has the ball, however, the less likely the Huskies are to score.

September 2 - Baylor opens the season by shocking then-No. 14 TCU 50-48 on Aaron Jones' game-winning field goal. The next day, Robert Griffin III made an appearance on College GameDay.	September 24 - Baylor defeats Rice 56-31 on Parents Weekend behind Griffin's six total touchdowns (five passing, one rushing)	October 8 - Baylor rebounds at home by beating Iowa State 49-26. Terrance Ganaway rushed for 200 yards and three touchdowns.
September 17 - Baylor shuts out Stephen F. Austin 48-0 in a lightning-shortened game.	October 1 - Baylor loses its first game of the season 36-35 to Kansas State in Manhattan, Kan. Griffin still managed five touchdowns in the game.	October 15 - Baylor loses a tough road game at Kyle Field against Texas A&M 55-28. Griffin threw for a school-record 430 yards in the defeat.

Bears seek redemption in San Antonio

Alamo Bowl invite brings second chance after 1994 loss to Washington State

By DANIEL WALLACE
SPORTS WRITER

The Bears will have the luxury of staying in Texas to play in their second bowl in 2 years. The Valero Alamo Bowl will be played at San Antonio's Alamodome, in San Antonio which has a capacity of 66,000.

This is only the second Big 12 vs. Pac-12 match-up in Alamo Bowl history, with the first coming last year when Oklahoma State upended Arizona 36-10.

The Big Ten and the Big 12 were the conferences competing in the bowl from 1995-2010. In 1993 and 1994, the match-ups featured the Southwestern Conference and the Pac-10.

This year's selection into the Alamo Bowl for the Bears is the second time in school history.

In 1994, Baylor was a member of the Southwestern Conference and earned a bid into the Alamo Bowl.

The Bears did not come out on top in that game, however, as they fell to Washington State 10-3 in a defensive battle.

That year's Baylor squad set a then-school record of 359 points but was unable to generate much offense against the nation's second-ranked team.

The Bears' defense, however, did hold Washington State to just seven rushing yards in that game.

Since its inception in 1993, the Alamo Bowl has featured some of the most thrilling finishes and intriguing match-ups.

The 2008 Valero Alamo Bowl saw No. 23 Missouri top No. 20 Northwestern in the second overtime game in Alamo Bowl history.

The MVP of that game was the current offensive star wide receiver for the Philadelphia Eagles, Jeremy Maclin. He had the game-winning touchdown and returned a punt 75 yards for a touchdown in the second quarter to lead his Tigers past the Wildcats 30-23.

The 2000 Sylvania Alamo



MATT HELLMAN | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR

No. 24 running back Terrance Ganaway celebrates after his touchdown against the Longhorns at the Floyd Casey Stadium Saturday. The Bears beat Texas 48-24 in the last game of the regular season. The Bears go into the game ranked No. 17

Bowl was an offensive explosion, where 83 points were scored. The Nebraska Corn Huskers scored 66 of those points and proved too powerful offensively for Northwestern. The Cornhuskers offense put up 636 total yards, 467 of which were rushing yards, which both are Alamo Bowl records.

The No. 18 Texas A&M Aggies were dominated by the No. 13 Penn State Nittany Lions in the 1999 Sylvania Alamo Bowl.

The Aggies lost 24-0, never recovering from quarterback Randy McCown's first two pass

attempts that were intercepted, including a 34-yard touchdown return for the first points of the game.

In a rematch in 2007, the Aggies fell again to the Nittany Lions 24-17 despite grabbing an early two-touchdown lead.

In 1998, the No. 4 ranked Kansas State Wildcats trailed 30-20 with 6:44 remaining in regulation against the Purdue Boilermakers. They rallied for two touchdowns to take a 34-30 lead with 84 seconds left on the clock after a touchdown from Wildcat quarterback Darnell McDonald

to tight end Justin Swift. That was too much time for the 1998 Big 10 Offensive Player of the Year and future Superbowl MVP, Drew Brees.

In an 80-yard drive that only took 54 seconds to complete, Brees found Isaac Jones for the game-winning touchdown to stun the Wildcats and put the finishing touches on a wild, comeback victory. The 1998 Wildcats' No. 4 rank is the highest of any team to play in the Alamo Bowl.

The Big 12 is 7-7 all-time in the Alamo Bowl and the Pac-10 is 2-1.



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

The Bears will face off against Washington State in the 2011 Valero Alamo Bowl at 8 p.m. on Dec. 29 at the Alamodome. The last Alamo Bowl for Baylor was in 1994 when the team lost to Washington State 10-3.

Sports take: A love letter to the BCS

Dear BCS organizers,

I am absolutely thrilled with your decisions this year. Although the vast majority of America wants to see a playoff system and there are probably ways to have that make more money anyways, you guys have really stuck to your corrupt principles and kept the BCS Championship series.

The BCS bowl series this year, in particular, was extremely well-organized. The bowls were perfectly selected. Many people might have thought that LSU should have played Oklahoma State, you know, since they're clearly the top two teams. 80 percent of the voters on ESPN wanted to see Oklahoma State in the championship instead of a game they'd already seen, but you all were smart enough to know better. Seeing Alabama in the championship will be super boring and that's what America really wants, even if Americans say they wanted something completely different.

Think about if Alabama wins and how cool that will be. You guys know this already, of course, but I want to go through the rea-



Joshua Madden | A&E editor

soning so I can really praise it as much as it deserves.

If Alabama wins, a team that didn't even win its conference championship will be the national champion and, since you guys are still smart enough to not put in a playoff system, you can't blame it on the excitement of a tournament. Nothing but pure, unbridled entitlement for Alabama!

I also want to praise you all for not selecting any of the teams ranked between sixth and ninth for a major bowl. Given that the

major bowls are theoretically supposed to represent the top 10 teams in America, a lot of people would have probably expected you to actually select the teams that deserved to be there.

As a graduate from Kansas State, how could I not love seeing my team in the Cotton Bowl instead of getting one of the at-large bids?

Being eighth in the country, they certainly deserved to be in a more important bowl, but now they'll get to play in a lesser one. Much less stressful for the players; I can see that you were clearly looking out for their well-being by ignoring them and instead choosing Virginia Tech (ranked 11) and Michigan (ranked 13) for the Sugar Bowl.

Even cooler is West Virginia – ranked 23rd in the country – being included in one of the major bowls. They definitely deserve to be there because they won a really mediocre conference. You guys were smart enough to say “Rankings be damned!” when setting up the BCS structure and for that I applaud you.

No one would have rather seen potential Heisman winner

Robert Griffin III lead the 12th-ranked Baylor bears to a victory than see West Virginia play, and you guys were smart enough to

“80 percent of the voters on ESPN wanted to see Oklahoma State in the championship instead of a game they'd already seen, but you all were smart enough to know better.”

Joshua Madden | A&E Editor

figure that out.

On top of all of this, your ability to continue not doing a playoff system helps to make the Heisman race more muddled than it needs to be, especially given that Heisman voting is inexplicably placed before the thing you call

a post-season. That definitely doesn't need to change.

I mean, it would be a lot clearer whether Andrew Luck or Robert Griffin III should actually win the Heisman if they, you know, got to play each other, but America doesn't want that. America doesn't want the best person (RG3) to win the Heisman outright. The country wants a surprise disfigured by lobbying and conference bias. That's what America wants and you guys are making sure we get helpings of it.

How could I not love the Bowl Championship Series? March Madness is by far the least exciting time in all of competitive sports and I would hate to see something totally not exciting like that implemented in football. Filling out brackets and competing with friends is horrible – I want more meaningless bowls with teams that don't deserve to be there and you guys have never failed to deliver.

Sincerely,
Joshua Madden

PS: I really, really hate you, BCS organizers.

On the Web



Who are we?

The 2011 football season was filled with big wins and lost rivalries, but when President Starr asked the Bears to “Rise Up,” that’s just what we did. Check out the sic’em filled action in the Lariat original film, “We Are Baylor,” only on baylorlariat.com Also check out our photo slideshow.

October 29 - Baylor loses to Oklahoma State 59-24. Griffin throws for 425 yards and one touchdown in the loss. The loss looks to be the end of Griffin's Heisman campaign.	November 12 - Baylor pulls “The Comeback,” erasing a 21-point fourth quarter deficit to defeat Kansas 31-30 in overtime.	November 26 - Baylor defeats Texas Tech 66-42 on Ganaway's 246 yards, four shy of school record. Nick Florence comes in for Griffin and throws for two touchdowns, capping off the “November to Remember.”
November 5 - Baylor rebounds against Missouri 42-39 on Homecoming. Ganaway rushes for 186 yards and two touchdowns.	November 19 - Baylor upsets then No. 5 Oklahoma 45-38 on Griffin's 479 passing yards and four touchdown, including the “Immaculate Reception” by Wright.	December 3 - Baylor destroys Texas 48-24. Griffin has 320 passing yards and four total touchdowns against the Big 12's highest-ranked defense.



MATT HELLMAN | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR

No. 2 wide receiver Terrance Williams catches the ball along with Texas A&M No. 22 defensive back Dustin Harris Oct. 15. Possession was given to Texas A&M, which ended up defeating the Bears 55-28.

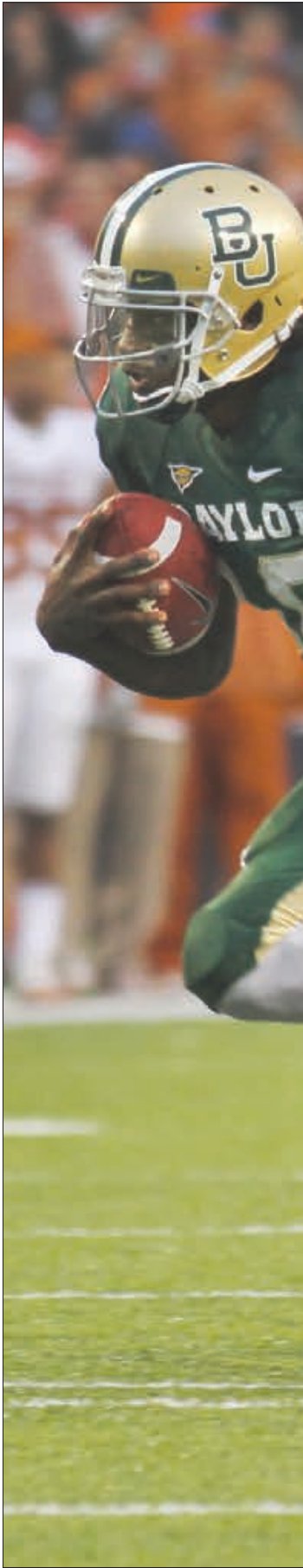
Get ready, San Antonio

The Lariat looks forward to the Alamo Bowl by looking back over Baylor's record-setting 2011 football season



MATT HELLMAN | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR

No. 24 runningback Terrance Ganaway runs the ball in for a touchdown Nov. 27. at the Texas Shootout in Cowboys Stadium. The Bears celebrated their victory over Texas Tech University with a final score of 66-42.



No. 10 quarterback Robert Griffin III



MAKENZIE MASON | ROUND UP PHOTO EDITOR

No. 16 inside receiver Tevin Reese attempts to break away from Oklahoma's No. 14 defensive back Aaron Colvin on Nov. 19. The Bears beat OU 45-38 for the first time in 21 matchups.



MEAGAN DOWNING | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 10 Robert Griffin III starts the play against TCU on Sept. 2 at Floyd Casey Stadium. Baylor beat TCU 50-48.



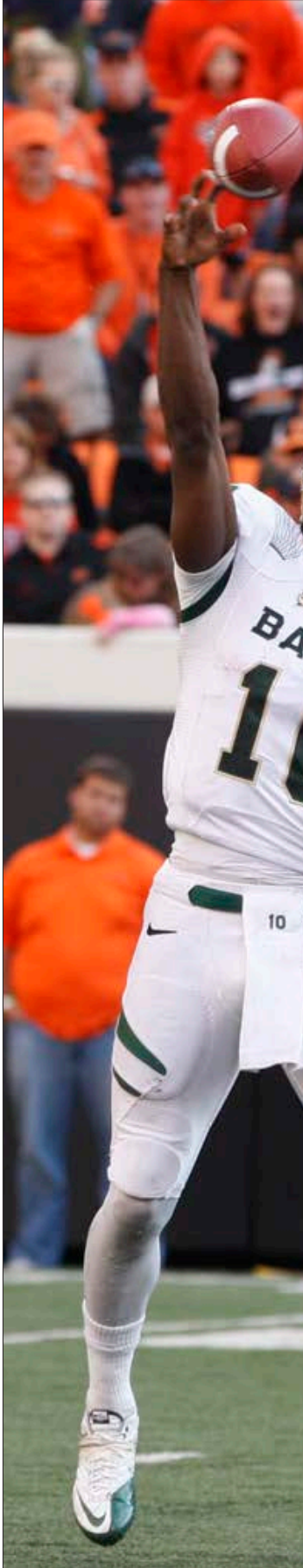
MAKENZIE MASON | ROUND UP PHOTO EDITOR

The team comes out of the tunnel into the stadium before the game against Iowa State on Oct. 8.



MAKENZIE MASON | ROUND UP PHOTO EDITOR

No. 42 inside receiver Levi Norwood dodges opponents during the game against Rice on Sept. 24. Baylor blew away Rice 56-31.



Quarterback Robert Griffin III passes fourth quarter on Oct. 29 in Stillwater



MATT HELLMAN | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR

carries the ball down the field for a first down during the game against Texas at Floyd Casey Stadium on Saturday. The Bears upset the Longhorns with a 48-24 victory, making them undefeated at home and securing a bid to the Alamo bowl.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

s under pressure from Oklahoma State linebacker James Thomas during the game against Oklahoma State at Floyd Casey Stadium, Oct. 29, 2011. Oklahoma State won 59-24.



MATT HELLMAN | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR

No. 10 quarterback Robert Griffin III hurdles over Missouri No. 1 defensive back Kip Edwards for a first down Nov. 5 at Floyd Casey Stadium. The Bears ended up with a 42-39 victory over the Tigers.



MATT MCCARROLL | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

The Baylor Golden Wave Marching Band stands in the Texas formation in the game against Stephen F. Austin on Sept. 17 at Floyd Casey Stadium. The Bears celebrated a 48-0 victory over Stephen F. Austin.

A hero in his own Wright

Senior wide receiver Kendall Wright complements Griffin but sets his own records

By DANIEL WALLACE
SPORTS WRITER

Even Superman can't do it alone.

While most of the credit for the Bears' stellar offense this season is attributed to Heisman hopeful quarterback Robert Griffin III, and rightfully so, one player stands out as Griffin's right-hand man when the Bears take the field on offense.

Of Griffin's 267 completions, 101 of them have gone to the player who wears the number seven, senior wide receiver Kendall Wright.

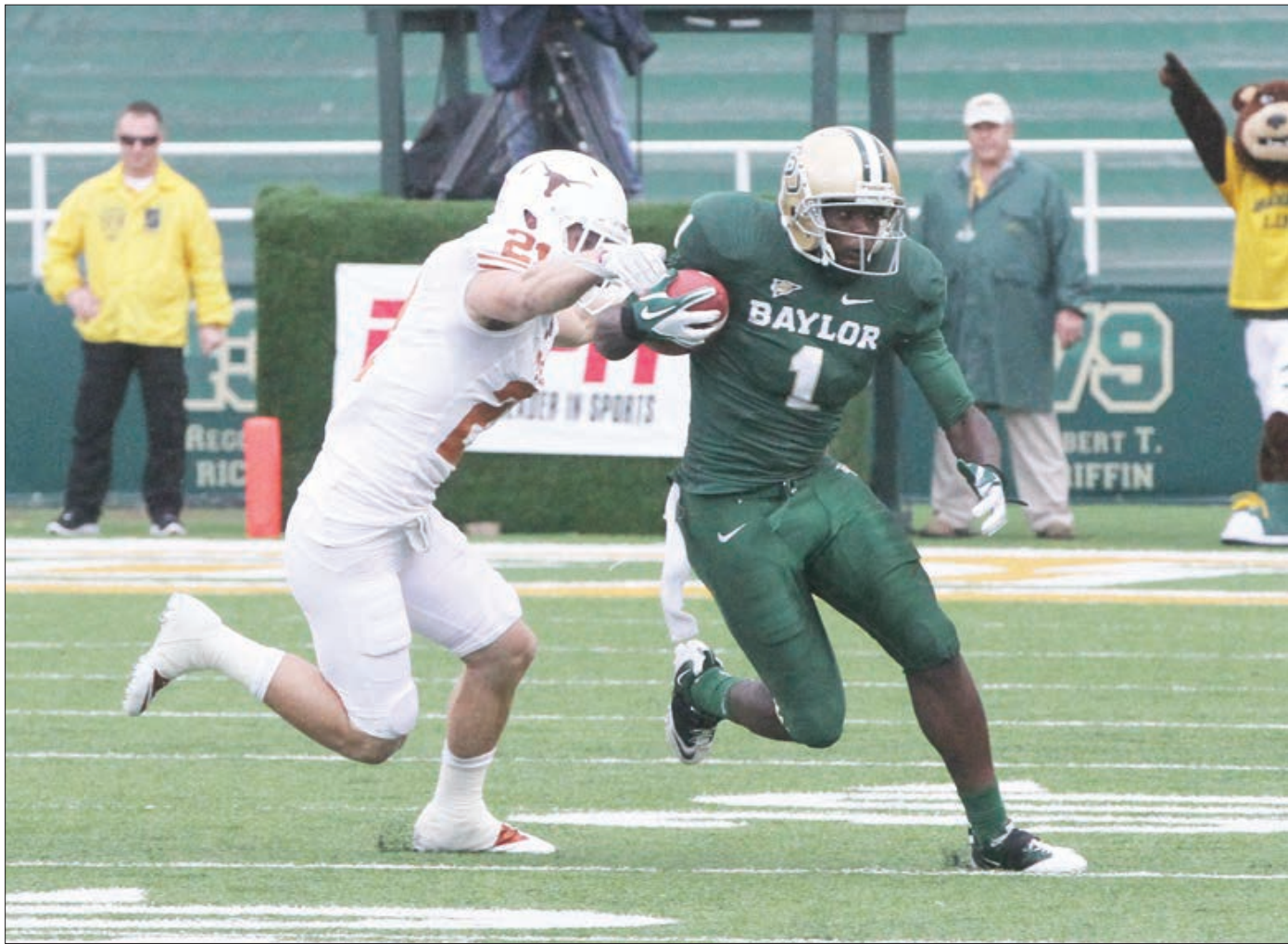
Wright came to Baylor from Pittsburg, Texas, and has been making big plays and eye-popping catches for the Bears ever since.

In 2008, his true freshman year, Wright made an immediate impact on the team; he led in receptions, receiving yards and touchdown catches. He holds several all-time school records with 3,913 receiving yards and 29 touchdowns. Wright caught passes in all his 49 career games for Baylor.

He is the only player in school history to record 200-plus receiving yards in a single game; he accomplished that feat twice, once at Kansas State on Oct. 1 and also in Baylor's upset victory over Oklahoma on Nov. 19.

Griffin said Wright is a dependable, reliable receiver he trusts, and he is not surprised to see Wright's leaping catches or athletic grabs.

"Kendall is that guy," Griffin said. "He will catch that anything you throw near him. If he believes he can catch it, he will catch it. I'm not amazed by anything that Kendall does, just because I've seen it and he's an amazing player, so



MATT MCCARROLL | LARIAT STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 1 senior receiver Kendall Wright breaks a tackle in the first half against Texas at Floyd Casey Stadium on Saturday. The Bears beat the Longhorns 48-24.

nothing that he does is like, 'Wow, how did he do that?'"

In turn, Wright said in the case of his special chemistry with Griffin, practice really does make perfect.

"It's the way we practice," he said. "It all starts with practice. If we don't practice hard every day, then none of this will happen. We won't be in sync, and it won't happen. So the way we practice, it translates to the game. Practice

hard and we play hard. We practice at a high level."

Art Briles, Baylor's head coach, said he has enjoyed watching Wright grow both as a receiver and as a person in his time at Baylor.

"He's been a tremendous weapon for us the last four years," he said. "The thing that we're most proud about Kendall is certainly how he's improved with maturity and with experience. There is only

one way to get that. That's to live it and feel it, and get on the field and play."

And the way Wright plays the game, Briles said, has been a determining factor in his growth. Wright, who considers himself No. 1 one in terms of receivers in the Big 12, credits his quickness and work ethic as what set him apart, but Briles said Wright's main contribution to the team is his mentality.

"Kendall is a guy that lays it on the line every time he plays, every snap," he said. "He plays at high rate of speed, which can be conducive to some minor bruises and sprains, but he has done a tremendous job of being a tough-minded, mature individual for us. It's been a good four years at Baylor University for him and for us."

Baylor will lose Wright, a general studies major, when he graduates in May.

Senior defense player Elliot Coffey brings his best game on, off the field

By TYLER ALLEY
SPORTS EDITOR

The darkest of days: Baylor football 2007.

This is how senior inside linebacker Elliot Coffey described his true freshman year playing for the Bears; it comes in marked contrast to the team's recent successes.

Coffey said that during this time, players faced internal questions about their participation in Baylor football due to the team's bad record and had to work hard to keep from getting down.

"When you're working as hard as you are and you're losing, it makes you think, 'What I am doing? What am I doing wrong?' You have to reassess yourself," he

said.

Baylor went 3-9 overall, 0-8 in the Big 12 that year. Now things are looking sunny. Baylor, which finished the season 9-3, is on its way to the Valero Alamo Bowl and the defense has forced a turnover in every game this season.

Coffey said it was monumental for the 2007 team to even think it could beat a Big 12 team, an immense difference to the team's attitude this season.

"There was so much pessimism that was still floating around the program from guys who had just been defeated for so long that [the players] had really just accepted that as their fate," he said.

"To approach games like we do now, knowing that we're a solid

team, and Coach [Art] Briles says it, we're a great team and we have great players. And it's just great to see that it's changed the way it has. It's night and day from the way it used to be."

The highlight of the season for Baylor has been the "November to remember" where the team went 4-0; the defense played a big role in those four wins with 11 turnovers, and then six turnovers in the following game against Texas. Coffey himself earned Big 12 Defensive Player of the Week for his performance against Kansas, in which he had 10 tackles, one tackle for loss and two interceptions. Coffey, who has been called one of the leaders of the defense, said he is excited to see what the team is capable of doing.

"We have made big plays that we needed to make. It's great to see guys that I've seen work, guys that I've seen grind, get yelled at by [defensive coordinator Phil] Bennett, go out there and make those plays. It just shows these guys are working, but they can make plays."

Coffey said he credits the team's turnaround with the arrival of the current coaching staff. However, the transition was not easy.

"There were guys, when Coach Briles got here, did not buy into his system, did not buy into [assistant athletic director of athletic performance Kaz Kazadi's] system, felt that what they were doing was the right way, that they would win doing what they were

doing, and that wasn't the situation at all," Coffey said. "So the more you see people buy into the system, the more people you see people accept how things are going to change, it really changed."

And once he and other players began to follow the program Bennett, Briles, Kazadi and linebacker coach Jim Gush were implementing, things began to improve, he said. And not just on the playing field: Head Coach Art Briles highly praised Coffey in a recent interview.

"I am very proud of Elliot for a variety of reasons: being a great leader, a great teammate, being a great spokesperson for our football program and our university," Briles said. "The apple didn't fall far from the tree. He has got a great mom and dad who have certainly raised him in a positive way to where he is more concerned with others than himself."

In terms of his personal growth, Coffey said the move from being an athletically gifted suburban kid in high school to a college linebacker was about the more than talent.

"I didn't have to go out there and focus on the details as much as I did, say, coming to college, where you understand that the game isn't about being the best athlete anymore," Coffey said. "It's about how smart you are, how you can adjust to the different looks that you get, how you can listen to your coaching. It's precious what you're given, and you got to work and stay on and preserve."

Coffey is currently devoting all of his focus to the bowl game, but he said he hopes to keep playing football as a professional outside Baylor. It's in his blood; his dad played for the Washington Redskins. However, if that doesn't work out, Coffey's major in speech communications will provide an outlet, and hopefully a career, in which to use his off-field talents.



MEAGAN DOWNING | LARIAT PHOTOGRAPHER

No. 4 linebacker Elliot Coffey tries to escape a Rice player on Sept. 24, at Floyd Casey Stadium. Baylor beat Rice 56-31.

A little
birdie
told us



Baylor Nation tweets
On [The Alamo Bowl](#)

[@StephanieSBarry](#)
"Baylor's headed to the Alamo Bowl, coach Art Briles announces" yippee!"

[@volkthehulk](#)
"All I want for Christmas is tickets to the Alamo Bowl"

[@RoseyM_Sun](#)
"can't wait to go to the Alamo Bowl! It's going to be an awesome experience for Baylor Nation!"

[@AMINER777](#)
"It will not take 14 days for the Bears to win this Alamo."

[@J_Sko](#)
"so excited I can't believe it, I have to pinch myself sometimes just to make sure Im not dreaming. Ready to finish the season 10-3"

[@pressn4truth](#)
"Wahoo!"

[@TornadoRich](#)
"Baylor will travel well to San Antonio but the competition is lacking. Disappointed after I found out we are #12"

[@nickikennington](#)
"I am flying in for the bowl from Virginia! Bought my plane tickets yesterday. Class of '07 :)"

[@frankjuarez10](#)
"#BaylorNation will descend into the Alamodome and make the stadium shine in green and gold."

On [Robert Griffin III's Heisman candidacy](#)

[@jadderol](#)
"Congrats RG3 on the Heisman nod. Hopefully the voters will remember that its best player in FBS, not best player on the best team!"

[@PenlandLife](#)
"Incredible student. Incredible athlete. Incredible football player. But most importantly, incredible person! #RGIIIforHeisman"

[@jaredslack](#)
"my fear is that #RGIII winning the heisman and him staying for his final season are mutually exclusive... we can't have both."

[@BAYLOR_PAYTON](#)
"RG3 was integral to revitalizing Baylor football, more so then Andrew Luck for Stanford! Sic Em Griffin!"

[@sstrakejr](#)
"RG3ismen!"

[@BYXBaylor](#)
"Congratulations to Robert Griffin III! Make #BaylorNation proud in NYC!"

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"I'm really excited to get back [to San Antonio]. Me and my friends will definitely be out having a good time right after we watch the Bears win the bowl game," Saenz said.

Congratulations Baylor Bears, RG III and Coach Briles & Staff on One of the Most Awesome Seasons We Have Ever Seen!



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