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Jeremy Roach (3)
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CATCH ME IF YOU CAN Sophomore midfielder Theresa McCullough chases down the ball during Baylor soccer's 1-0 loss to Arizona on Sept. 19 at Betty Lou Mays Field.

Baylor soccer readies for No. 16 Colorado

NATE MAKI
Sports Writer

After shutting out Houston 4-0 on Sunday, Baylor soccer must carry its momentum all the way to Boulder, Colo., to take on No. 16 Colorado at 8 p.m. on Thursday at Prentup Field.

The Bears (6-4-1, 1-2-0 Big 12) had a tough start to conference play, with a pair of 1-0 losses to then-No. 15 Oklahoma State and Arizona. Breaking through in the third game of conference play to put a win on the board, head coach Michelle Lenard is doing everything she can to keep the players in proper shape despite the new environment as they face the Buffaloes (9-1-0, 3-0-0 Big 12).

"The biggest challenge at that higher altitude is dehydration," Lenard said. "We always encourage the girls to eat a little extra leading up to a game, as well as getting some more sleep. Training in the heat is a great way to practice playing at high altitude, so we have that covered. All of these things add up, so we're going to be ready."

Sophomore defender Natalie Vatter, who transferred to Baylor prior to the 2023 season after redshirting in her freshman year at Ole Miss, has been a "reliable player with a contagious work ethic" for Lenard. With elite play on the back line to start the season, she is looking forward to testing her skills against some old friends.

"I grew up in Colorado, so I actually have a lot of old teammates who play on that team," Vatter said. "They're going to be talented, so we're going to have to play our best. [That win] was exactly what we needed. It's really just boosted our confidence."

With Colorado leading the Big 12, Lenard highlighted its defense and the talent on the front line that has propelled the first-year Big 12 team into pole position. After breaking down the Buffaloes' film with the coaching staff, sophomore forward Skylar Zinnecker thinks playing the skilled defense will test Baylor's offense in all the right ways.

"Colorado is a good opportunity for us, and I think we're set up for success," Zinnecker said. "I think we've all felt that we're on the cusp of success, so it was especially frustrating that we didn't perform to well in our last couple games. It felt really good to get that win against Houston. We all know what we're capable, and this win is going to help us turn that corner."



Foster Nicholas | Sports Editor

BACK TO WORK Head coach Scott Drew sits in front of the media and outlines his expectations for the 2024-25 season prior to Baylor men's basketball's first fall practice Monday at Foster Pavilion.

Drew, men's basketball find chemistry with new roster

JACKSON POSEY
Sports Writer

The transfer portal era is in full swing in Waco. After three straight second-round exits in the NCAA Tournament, head coach Scott Drew has overhauled the Baylor men's basketball roster, bringing in nine newcomers — including three major-conference transfers and three blue-chip recruits.

"We're really excited, like every coach is right now, because you've got great hope and great excitement," Drew said. "We love the group we've put together, just like everybody else out there. But I really like the experience with the inexperience. It's tough to get that blend nowadays, and I really feel the coaches did a great job, the assistant coaches, in bringing together a group that likes one another, that plays for each other, and at the same time provide a lot of different experiences that make you a well-rounded team."

Four NBA players are heading out the door, including first-round picks Ja'Kobe Walter, now with the Toronto Raptors, and Yves Missi, now playing for the New Orleans Pelicans. Priority undrafted free agent Jalen Bridges now plays forward for the Phoenix Suns and RayJ Dennis signed an Exhibit 10 deal with the Los Angeles Clippers earlier this month. Jonathan Tchamwa-Tchatchoua joined the San Antonio Spurs as a guest coach for summer league. Caleb Lohner and Miro Little transferred to newly-minted conference foe Utah, Lohner to play football. Former walk-on and fan favorite Austin Sacks is finally out of eligibility.

But the cupboard is far from bare for Drew, who rebuffed offseason advances from Kentucky to remain at Baylor.

In comes the highest-ranked recruiting class in program history, headlined by a pair of five-stars: über-athlete VJ Edgecombe, the highest-ranked recruit in program history, and high-powered point guard Rob Wright, whose early returns drew rave reviews from his teammates. Four-star wing Jason Asemota should also push for playing time after starring at Hillcrest Prep in Phoenix.

"[It's] almost like an AAU [Amateur Athletic Union] — but way more structured, way more disciplined, and this team's gonna be a really good team," Asemota said. "I'm just looking forward to winning. Because we're going to win a lot of games, and we're going to face a lot of good teams, and I'm just so excited to see how we face adversity when it comes."

Edgecombe will inevitably draw the most headlines after shining for the Bahamas alongside NBA players at the Olympic Qualifying Tournament this summer. The No. 4 recruit in the country is set to make an instant impact on both sides of the floor.

"I feel like VJ is going to actually help this team a lot," junior center Josh Ojianwuna said. "He's a very good defensive player, and I feel like our team is a team who will buy in on defense, I feel like that's a win for us. I feel like VJ is gonna impress the team a lot both on defense and offense. ... I feel like everyone has the drive he has on buying in on defense; I feel like we'll have a chance to go very far this year."

But beyond the hype, don't expect all three freshmen to start on day one. They'll get a luxury rarely afforded to stacked recruiting classes in today's college basketball landscape: the opportunity to play with other established stars.

Enter fifth-year senior Duke transfer guard Jeremy Roach, who averaged 14.0 points, 2.5 rebounds and 3.3 assists in his senior season with the Blue Devils, and fifth-year senior Miami transfer forward Norchad Omier, who averaged 17.0 points and 10.0 rebounds in 2023-24. The pair come to Waco with Final Four experience, and will play key roles on and off the court on a roster without much built-in veteran leadership.

"Jeremy and Norchad, both Final Four participants, and people that are all-conference, and put numbers in the books, and most of all, won for really good programs," Drew said. "So they bring a lot of really good wisdom and experience to the table. At the same time, they haven't reached all the goals and dreams they want to, and they have an opportunity to do that one more year with the COVID year."

Three rotation players remain: Ojianwuna, redshirt junior guard Langston Love and senior guard Jayden Nunn. They

bear the unique responsibility of passing on the Bears' 'Culture of JOY' to a new generation.

"I just try to get everybody on the rope," said Love, the longest-tenured player on the team. "That's our saying that we have here, 'Everybody on the rope.' Everybody's coming in new from different programs, and I just wanna show them what we do at Baylor. Once that is instilled, then everything's going to be right."

Baylor men's basketball has not announced its official non-conference schedule, but plans to do so in coming weeks. Stay up to date with all things Baylor Athletics on @BULariatSports on X, formerly known as Twitter, or baylorlariat.com/sports.



VJ Edgecombe (7)
Foster Nicholas | Sports Editor