

Baylor Bears 2008 College Football Betting Preview

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Baylor University, the only private school in the BIG 12 Conference, is attempting to get its football program back to respectability, a place it hasn't been since joining the league over a decade ago. Former Houston coach Art Briles has been tasked with returning Baylor football to a winning program, something three other coaches have failed to do since becoming a member of the BIG 12. Online oddsmakers at Sportsbook.com aren't impressed with the new leadership changes at Baylor in spite of the talent numbers returning. The Bears are listed at +10,000 money line odds to win the BIG 12 championship and aren't on oddsmakers radar to win a BCS Championship. At the BIG 12 Media meetings held in Kansas City last week, Baylor was picked to finish last in the BIG 12 South in a vote of media representatives. The Bears were respected if not feared as members of the former Southwest Conference and they had a coach, Grant Teaff, who was second to none. It was the tradition built by Teaff and his program that made the school an attractive addition when the BIG 12 Conference was created. Since joining the conference in 1996, Baylor has held a 13-43 record in regular season play, the worst record in the South Division. Baylor has gone through four coaching changes since joining the league. Offensively, the Bears return nine starters from last year's unit which averaged 351.2 yards per game. Baylor's offensive line, which allowed just 21 sacks last year, returns four starters. At running back, sophomore Jay Finley emerged from spring ball No. 1 on the depth chart. The Bears also return eight of their top nine receivers from a year ago, including four of five players who caught at least 30 balls in 2007.

Two quarterbacks, junior Blake Szymanski and senior Kirby Freeman, are battling for the starting job in August drills. Szymanski started 10 games in 2007. Freeman is eligible this year after transferring from Miami (Fla.) following the 2006 season.

After playing a 4-2-5 defense the past five years, Baylor has switched to a 4-3 look in 2008 with the arrival of new defensive coordinator Brian Norwood from Penn State. The Bears return six starters from a year ago, including their top two tacklers in junior safety Jordan Lake and junior linebacker Joe Pawelek who had 120 and 99 tackles, respectively, a year ago.

Look for Baylor to surprise some people in 2008. The Bears open with Wake Forest to a national television audience on FSN. A win over the Demon Deacons would go a long way in getting the school some national attention not to mention team confidence. Washington State comes to visit Floyd Casey Stadium Sept. 13 followed by a trip to BIG EAST member UConn. All these games are winnable for Baylor.

It's unlikely Baylor will have the team to compete with Big 12 powers Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Texas Tech, but the rest of the schedule is friendly. If Baylor gets the right breaks, a 7-5 season is within reach but 6-6 is more realistic. If the Bears get off on the wrong foot and lose at home to Wake Forest and Washington State, they could be in for a long season.

Point-Spreads.com prediction: Baylor pulls some surprises and goes 7-5 in their first year under Briles. Baylor University 2008 Football Schedule and prediction Aug 30 Wake Forest FSN national telecast (win) Sep 06 Northwestern State (FCS, Southland Conference)(win) Sep 13 Washington State FSN (win) Sep 19 @ UConn ESPN2 (win) Oct 04 Oklahoma (lose) Oct 11 Iowa State (win) Oct 25 @ Nebraska (win) Nov 01 Missouri (lose) Nov 08 @Texas(lose) Nov 15 Texas A&M (win) Nov 29 @Texas Tech (lose)