**Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule**

**Weekly Press Conference**

**Sept. 19, 2017**

**Opening Statement**
“First, we appreciate everyone being here. Thanks for coming out to practice. Thanks for talking to our kids and then coming up and listening to us today. Just a couple thoughts about the Duke game: Obviously that was one that we are disappointed with and let slip away. Lots of credit goes to them. I thought the defense played well enough to win at times. On offense, Chris Platt continues to be a bright spot, making plays. But at the end of the day, we weren’t able to make the plays. It was a four-point ball game in the fourth quarter, but we weren’t able to make the plays down the stretch that we needed to make. You could certainly see improvement, but that’s not what we’re headed to, so that’s why we’re out here working on today. It’s nice to have a couple guys back this week. Taion Sells is back from suspension. Grayland Arnold and Terence Williams both practiced today, so hopefully that’ll give us a boost in the run game with Terence, and then Grayland was a guy in the preseason who we felt like was one of our top players, so hopefully he can go out and give us something in the coverage game as well. We’re looking forward to playing a fantastic Oklahoma team. Coach Riley and I, I have a lot of respect for him, and he’s certainly doing a great job there. They are certainly well-balanced and a well-rounded football team. It’s a tremendous opportunity for our players to play against the number 2 team in the country, a team that went to Ohio State and beat them on their field. Baker Mayfield, as we all know, is a fantastic quarterback, and he has a tremendous amount of weapons around him. Defensively, they have a really good defense. They shut down Ohio State, held them under 20 points. And so, we certainly have our work cut out for us and we’re excited to try to get something done against them. With that, I’ll see what questions you guys have.”

**On K.J. Smith and Ishmael Wilson injuries…**
“Ish Wilson practiced today. K.J. [Smith] is still limited, and we’re still figuring out how to get him completely healthy again. He’s still working through it. I would say K.J. would not play this week.”

**On if defensive help is coming at the perfect time…**
“I’d say we think it is perfect timing with conference play beginning. As we said to our players, this nine-game stretch is really where we find out who we are and what we’re going to do. Defensively, we’re not good yet, but we’re getting better, and adding a guy like Grayland [Arnold] in really helps. What we’ve done is add in some depth after the unfortunate injuries and suspensions. Now, once you hit conference play, you feel like you have four, five, or six corners that can go into the game. It’s not so much about them as it is your special teams. It’s about, as you play these tempo teams, your ability to go deeper into your bench. So that’s the one benefit coming out of these first three games, we played a lot of guys. Some of them wouldn’t have played without the injuries, to be quite frank. But now they have the experience, and hopefully that’ll pay off for us as we hit this run.”

**On if Terence Williams’ return helps the other running backs…**“Yeah I think it takes a little bit of the pressure off the young guys. I think when they were running with JaMycal [Hasty], [John] Lovett and [Trestan] Ebner and [Dru] Dixon were running as a great change of pace. Once they became the guys, they just haven’t been able to take off yet. Lovett has had some really bright moments. They’ve all had bright moments and I’m happy with what they’ve done, but you’d just like to have someone else go be there hammer, and then you can go in there and be the change of pace. I think Terence [Williams] gives us the physicality and a presence running the football that you can clearly see on tape. To me, people see what’s happening offensively right now. You have to be able to run the football, and we’ve got to go make some plays. When we get the ball to the second level, you make somebody miss, and I think Terence brings that to us. He brings us that ability to run you over and make you miss, and hopefully that’ll engage some of the other young backs, so that as their load gets decreased a little bit, whenever they do get a shot, they go in there and make a play.”

**On stick with Zach Smith at quarterback against OU…**
“Well, Anu [Solomon] is still not back, and he’s still out for this game, but I thought Zach [Smith] did some really good things. He threw a tipped ball interception that we have to catch, but at the end of the day, we got to start jumping up and catching the football and making some plays. We watched the third downs, those three or four balls we throw it to the guy where he’s supposed to be, and we just got to go make the play. Once we start jumping up and catching the football and getting the run game going, then I think we can fairly evaluate where Zach is, but I like his toughness. He stood out there and took a beating, but that all has to change. Offensively, we have to get a little tougher up front to be able to protect, and we have to go catch the football. I think we had five drops in that game, and another four that were 50/50 balls, and right now the 50/50 balls are not coming our way. So that’s what we’re challenging our guys to go do, and I think you’ll see [Denzel] Mims and those guys respond the way Chris Platt has responded so far.”

**On issues with third down…**
“Well, the defense was good. The defense was 4-for-18 last week, so the defense kept us in the game. I think since halftime of the UTSA game, they’re 4-for-24, so they’re getting better. To me, as I use a simplistic thought process, it comes down to whether or not we’re getting a pass rush. Whether it’s from [Eric] Ogor or whatever, we had five sacks, and we probably could’ve had three or four more. When you have a pass rush, it speeds up the offense, and that’s why we’re winning on third down. Offensively, the other team has a pass rush, and we’re not able to hang in there. We’re not in 3rd-and-3 or 3rd-and-4, so that’s a function of our inability to run the football right now. So, when you’re in 3rd-and-10, and you can’t really protect, that’s an issue. So how do you get that better? You’ve got to run the football. We had 10 penalties in the first half. I’ll stand up here and sometimes say that’s on me. No one has coached no penalties harder than I have and harder than our staff has. At some point, our guys need to step up and say, “You know what? I’m going to stop jumping offside.” And I say that with love, I don’t say that calling them out. You wanna win? Go win. Don’t jump offside on the first drive. So, 10 penalties in the first half. I look at how I can do it better, but at the end of the day, we’re in conference play, and if you want to win, just don’t jump offside. If you want to win, go catch that ball. If you want to win, make that guy miss and block that guy. And that’s what great players do. We’ve got some guys that have a chance to be great players. You see [Chris] Platt doing it, so we just need some other guys to step up. And that to me is the issue on third down. I think Tony [Nicholson] is going to step up this week and make some plays on third down. I think Zach [Smith] is going to put the ball where it needs to be. To me, the number one thing we need to correct on this team is our third down and penalty issues.”

**On level of excitement for this week…**
“I certainly would think you’d be excited to play Oklahoma. What a wonderful football team in every aspect. You have a chance to play against great players. You have a chance to play against probably a first round draft pick at left tackle. You have a chance to play against great young receivers, an amazing tight end, and a great quarterback, so you hope that great players and great teams bring out the best in your team. And I think it’s a chance for our guys. As I said to our guys, we were sitting here last year, I wasn’t here obviously, but I’m going to say we, at 3-0 entering conference play. And we got into conference play, and we went 3-6 in conference play. So now we’re sitting here at 0-3, but we’re still 0-0 in conference, so go try to win conference games. Go out every week to compete and fight to win conference games. Don’t go out there and go 3-6 in conference play. Go 6-3. Go 7-2. Go whatever it is in the conference. Go find a way. That mindset of conference, to me, is that preseason is gone and over with, and you learned a lot of lessons from that time, and now you have to apply those lessons as we get into the conference and see if we can go beat some of these teams. And this is a tremendous opportunity to play against a great team. I always tell our team the tougher team will win. And the reality of it is the tougher team won the last three weeks for us. And we’re getting tougher. You could see it on defense. That was the first time I was sitting in the huddle and guys are yelling and screaming on defense. We are getting tougher, but we just got to get a little tougher on offense. Tough doesn’t always mean getting into a fight. Tough means, “I’m going to lay out and get a one-handed catch” or “I’m going to jump over the top of somebody” or “I’m going to catch the ball and make four guys miss and run for a touchdown.” And that’s what conference play is about.”

**On what Chris Platt’s speed threat adds to the offense…**
“I think it makes people play us differently. They have to account for him. The nice thing is that, he’s beating people on some deep balls, but for him to take a screen and add that element to his game, the catch-and-run play. That means that we have a legitimate weapon that people have to game plan against. When you have speed like [Chris] Platt, a lot of people have to game plan against him. Some people might not feel that way. We just have to continue to get the ball into his hands. It was nice to see him show that wiggle and that run after the catch. I think [Denzel] Mims is on the doorstep. He had a big play in that game. He’s had a couple of big plays, but we just need one other weapon so people can’t just focus on taking away Platt.”

**On Oklahoma drill before the game…**
“It’s something I’ve always done. We do it before Tuesday and Wednesday practices, and our team hasn’t really always embraced it. So, I haven’t really wanted to do it. I’m not going to force them to do something. I think you’re seeing some older guys and some young guys stepping up and wanting to do it before practice, and so I said we’ll do it before the game. And that, to me, is a great opportunity to go out there and, as a team, come together and establish our physicality before the game. I don’t know if we’ll do it again this week. I think that’s something that has to come from the players. It can’t come from the coaches. I know those guys that were out there last week, Taylor Young and those guys, wanted to see it.”

**On the value of punter Drew Galitz…**
“I think he’s been outstanding. He can flip the field, and we put a little bit of that rugby punt in and try to mix that in every once in a while. When we first put that in, he wasn’t a big fan of it, but he’s worked at it. What he’s been able to do is change the trajectory and change the coverage lanes. I know he was the Ray Guy Punter of the Week, which was a great award for him. But with the 70-yarder and a bunch of balls inside the 10, I’d make sure I give credit to Bravvion [Roy] and Andrew Morris and Brian Nance and all those guys on the punt team, because they’re doing a great job of protecting him. Duke was coming after us and trying to block punts, but they gave him some protection, and that allowed him to settle down and really boom the ball, and it helped us a great deal.”

**On defense improving on quarterback contain with Baker Mayfield coming…**

“Yeah, I thought they did better this past week. [Daniel] Jones was the second leading rusher for Duke going into that game, and he’s really a tough kid. I thought there were a couple of times he was going to come out of the game. So, we’re getting better at that. You see Clay Johnston quietly developing into a defensive playmaker. [Eric] Ogor obviously a lot of people are talking about, he did some really good things. The thing with Baker is he will run the football, but it’s really his ability to create and scramble and keep plays alive and then get the ball downfield that makes truly special. So to me, you want your guys to be aggressive. They’ve got a great offensive line. You’ve got to go rush. If you leave him in the pocket, he’ll pick you apart, but you can’t be wild and be undisciplined. That’s what a mobile quarterback gives you, and I don’t know that there’s anybody better than him right now.”

**On defensive backs staying with their man when Mayfield scrambles…**

“He’s a guy that, as he scrambles, he’s always looking to throw. There’s a lot of guys that, when they scramble, they look to run, but he looks to throw. That tests not only your athleticism, but also your discipline to make sure you don’t give up the big play. Even going back to the Duke game, we played a lot of really good defense, but a couple big plays tilt the score. So, against Oklahoma we have to just make sure that. There’s no better big play offense. They see you in a coverage, they go right to a beater to beat that coverage. We have to eliminate the big plays, and part of that is staying disciplined, staying on our men, and not giving them a cheap one because they’re tough enough to beat just in terms of execution.”

**On concern with players returning from injury lacking playing experience this season….**

“No, that definitely concerns us. On defense especially, you have to practice to be good. It really usually shows up in missed tackles. The one thing that was nice about Grayland [Arnold] and Taion [Sells] was, up until a week before the first game, they were our starters and they were practicing every day. So they’ve got a ton of reps. Lenoy [Jones Jr.] missed a lot of action, so he’s going to have to work himself back in it, but he was out there practicing today. I know he got a lot of good reps. You just worry about missed tackles, and that’s one of the things that showed up. A couple of the guys that haven’t practiced all preseason last week missed tackles on those long runs. All three of those long runs, normally we would think that those balls would be down for a six, seven, eight-yard gain, but we weren’t able to make the play which is part of just growing them as a team and developing them. That’s why you need to practice during the preseason.”

**On the opportunity that OU presents, and what a win would mean…**

“Well it would probably give them some confidence, and it would be an exciting thing. I tell them every day that I’m going to be the same guy on Sunday. To me sometimes winning can be a disease to be quite honest with you. Sometimes when you win you don’t really look at the issues and the problems, and we certainly haven’t won the past three games so we’ve had a chance to look at the problems. I think a win would lift their spirits and have them excited, but at the same time we’d have to come back and say to ourselves, ‘now we’re getting ready to go play another ranked team in K-State coming off a bye week.’ The work’s going to be there no matter what. To me it’s all about process, what’s next, keep getting better, keep evaluating yourself, keep getting tougher, and keep developing the playmakers more. But it would be fun to win I know that.”

**On OU’s defense…**

“Well they’re a multiple defense. They’re the first 3-4 team we’ve truly seen, so that presents some issues and some problems for us. They’re big and physical. They generate pass rush. I’d hate to mispronounce his name, I always hate it when people mispronounce each other’s names and when I mispronounce our guy’s names, but number 31 [Ogbonnia] Okoronkwo, I think I’m saying that right. He is a dynamic player. They give him a lot of freedom as he rushes to rush up and under and not worry about having to contain the quarterback. I just think schematically they lined up and they played man against Ohio State, and they’re going to line up and play man. They’re going to get in our face and challenge us, and dare us to run the football. We have to match their level of intensity and toughness.”

**On player leadership after starting 0-3…**

“The level of accountability, leadership, and discipline on our team has just gone like this every week. It’s unbelievable. I like to watch parts of the game as a team afterwards so everyone can see. What happens is, you start to lose and guys start saying, ‘you should get the ball to me more.’ On any team really. I like to watch it as a team, so we can say, ‘this is what we did right. This is what we did wrong.’ The whole team can be together. You see guys like Taylor Young, Davion Hall, Greg Roberts, Ira Lewis, all these guys on defense. Then on offense you see guys like Chris Platt, guys like Mo Porter, Blake Blackmar, Zach Smith starting to emerge as leaders. Being a leader doesn’t mean that you’re perfect. Being a leader doesn’t mean you even played well. It just means that you hold yourself to a higher standard and you’re demanding the same standard from everyone else around you. That has not happened in the previous however many months I’ve been here, and it happened for the first time after this game, really at a high, high level. To me that’s really the most important thing to building a great program is developing player accountability and player discipline, and they are holding each other accountable. That was really nice to see for me.”

**On Jalen Pitre’s impact in the first recruiting class and now on the field…**

“I think number one, he’s our kind of a guy. He’s tough, he’s loyal, and he’s physical. He’s a young kid. He’s a true freshman. He’s learning through the fire right now, but I think he’s got a chance to be a really special player. He’s really just a great kid. He gave us a base to build off of. A lot of times when you talk about that recruiting class and the job that our staff did, Jalen was so key because sometimes when a coach gets fired at the end of the year, they’ve been recruiting kids all year. The kids have been on visits. They’ve seen campus. They’ve come to the games. And while you might not have a ton of commitments, they have a relationship with the school. We really had none of that. No one had really recruited anyone for a while. Jalen was the one kid that was still here, so that gave us something to build off of. That gave us a base, and he’s one of our guys. He’s one of us. He’ll just go like this over his career. He’s just too loyal and too tough and too instinctive. We have this kid playing for the Steelers that played in Phil’s defense, [Tyler] Matakevich, and he kind of reminds me of him. Just kind of makes plays. He’ll continue to elevate.”

**On what a packed house Saturday night would mean…**

“At the end of the day I think it’s always great when our fans and people are here. I’ll say two things. I thought it was a fantastic crowd in Durham. I mean honestly there was a time I literally pointed up in the crowd and said, ‘look at these people.’ Our fans were being louder than Duke’s fans. I think someone asked me the question yesterday. This is a team that everyone should get behind in my opinion. This is a team that people should support. There’s not many teams in college football that have done, I know you keep hearing me say it and it gets annoying, not many teams have done what these kids are doing to have 20 freshman and sophomores get in the game and start so far or play. They’re just going out there day in and day out and giving their best. They haven’t won. They just come back the next week and they get better. They do the right things off the field after the games. They’re going to end up being champions because they have a championship character. So, support them now. Follow them now. Follow them in the most adverse of times because those kids need to know that, ‘someone has my back.’

A lot of those kids that are playing, like the Gavin Holmes’ out there, when things were breaking at the end of recruiting and we were all over the newspaper, it was Gavin Holmes that was on Twitter saying, ‘I believe in Baylor, and I believe in what Baylor stands for, and I’m going to go there and be part of the solution.’ It was those kids that were defending Baylor, and they weren’t even a part of Baylor yet. So now, Baylor Nation, come support Gavin Holmes. Go out there and support him. That’s all I’ve ever said to our kids, the one thing about everything that our kids have been through, both what people said about them off the field and now what’s happening on the field, they always had to remember who they were. Coach Paterno used to say that us. Always remember who you are. Know who you truly are, not who people say you are, not what people write about you, not what people speak about you. Always remember who you are.

These are great kids, and they are fighting and fighting and fighting. They were there for Baylor. Taylor Young could have left. Taylor Young was on his way out the door, and he could’ve left. And you know what? Taylor Young’s out there competing right now for Baylor because he believes in something bigger than himself. I support them. I stayed here last night. Ask my wife. I slept in the office last night. I’m there for Taylor Young. I’m not out recruiting and trying to get ready for next year. I’m there for Taylor. I’m there for Davion [Hall]. That’s why I hope fans come. Not because we’re playing OU and not because we need a big crowd to make noise, but because this is about Baylor. This is about Baylor saying, ‘we’re going through a really hard time right now on the field. We’ve been through a hard time off the field. And you know what? Our character and who we are will emerge, and we will be champions again. We’re just going to do it day by day and do it the right way, and build a house on a rock.’ That’s the point to me. That’s why when I see those fans in the crowd, it means such a great deal to us in Durham. They’re there for us, and they’re there for Baylor and for the right reasons. They’re not there because we’re 6-0 and they’re 6-0, and that’s a special thing. I’m rambling here, but I’ll shut up in a second.

My alma mater, Penn State, went through some really hard times. It’s those teams that I respect the most. I grew up loving Curt Warner, and I grew up loving Todd Blackledge, but it’s those teams at Penn State that fought, that stayed there. It’s those kids like [Michael] Zordich that didn’t leave and go to another school. Those are the kids that, as a Penn Stater, held it together, so when we’re watching them in the Rose Bowl last year. When I’m watching Penn State in the Rose Bowl last year, I just think of those kids that could have quit and left. That’s why I stay in the office. That’s why Phil Snow is in here at 4:30 every morning because these kids are giving Baylor everything they have. We’ve got to give it back to them.”

**On how often he sleeps in his office…**

“Not very often. I don’t sleep in my office very often. I believe in going home and seeing my wife and kids, but sometimes on a Monday night just to through everything sometimes.”

**On Terence Williams watching and itching to get in the game…**

“Terence [Williams], I would say there probably hasn’t been a player that’s grown up more since the beginning of the season than Terence. I think it’s because he’s seen- sometimes when you’re playing all these lessons, you hear about being accountable, yes coach, being disciplined- I think he sees it, and he knows what he can do to help. He texted me after UTSA, and was like, ‘Coach please, I want to play this week.’ He wasn’t ready. The doctor said he wasn’t ready. To have him back out there, I think he knows the contribution he can make, and I think also recognizes how important it is to be a great teammate and to be part of a team. He is a much-welcomed addition back into the fold.”