**Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule**

**Weekly Press Conference**

**Sept. 26, 2017**

**Opening Statement…**  
“Good morning everybody, I appreciate you guys coming. We’re obviously excited to enter another game week going up against a great Kansas State team. We’re trying to build off of some of the things that happened over the past couple of weeks, some areas that we know we are improving in and some areas that we have to improve in. I’m proud of our kids’ effort on Saturday. I’m proud of their commitment to getting better. Offensively, I thought we were significantly more efficient on third down. We have to continue to find a way to try to run the football—it’s not been our strong point. We won’t be a great team until we can run the football, much like Oklahoma did against us. And then defensively, we have to continue to eliminate the big plays. They had 10 plays for 490 yards, and then the other 60 plays, we played pretty good defense. We’re trying to eliminate those big plays, and really, at the end of the day, the most disappointing thing for us, I think, was our inability to match their physicality in the fourth quarter. So that’s a challenge for us, and it couldn’t come at a better time, as we’re facing a Kansas State team that’s going to line up and come right at you, and we’re going to have to become a much more grown up, physical team, quickly, to have a chance against them.

In terms of injuries, Xavier Jones, I won’t get into details because I’m waiting on doctors to tell me exactly what everything is, but it looks like he’ll be out for an extended period of time, probably the whole year. He’s got a broken bone in his foot, amongst some other things, or in his leg. It looks like Chris Platt is out for the year with the knee. We’re waiting on some doctors to tell us exactly. Those guys have been tremendously loyal to us and have been great players for us, and we’re anxious to get them back for their senior year next year. As it is right now, it looks like they will be out for the season unless something changes. Mo Porter right now, if we were in the NFL, would be probable to play on Saturday. I think he should be able to go. Josh Malin got in the game and played admirably, and Josh is continuing to get better. So, if Mo can’t go, we’ll go with Josh. And with that, I’ll see what questions you guys have.”

**On making up for loss of Chris Platt…**  
“Well, I thought Denzel [Mims] rose to the occasion last game. I think Tony Nicholson rose to the occasion. Pooh Stricklin will step into that spot, and I thought Pooh played really well on Saturday. I don’t know if you can replace Chris’ big time, big play capabilities, but that’s where we are, so we’re going to have to rely on Pooh and Jared Atkinson and some other guys who have been waiting their turn and got in on Saturday. They’re going to have to step up in an effort to make up for Chris’ production.”

**On Mims’ breakout game…**  
“Yeah, he’s made a bunch of big plays so far this year, but this is the first time we saw him go up and make receiver plays. That first third down, we jumped up and went up and attacked the football. He has so much talent and so much potential, and he’s working at it, but that was the first time you saw some confidence, where he knew he could do this. The plays down the sideline, even the last touchdown catch, he became a guy with the matchup where we didn’t feel like they could cover him and he didn’t feel like they could cover him. And that was really good for the quarterback to know, that if he had 1-on-1 he could go over there to Denzel and he’d make the play.”

**On if offensive line play was a glimpse into their full potential…**  
“I was sitting there on the way over there thinking it was our fourth game and our fourth different offensive line combination. And then quickly, bang, Mo [Porter] goes down and we were on our fifth. I think they are getting better, but we weren’t able to match Oklahoma’s physicality in running the football. And really, not even physicality, but just some mistakes here and there. But I like the direction. I like the way they’re moving, and I like that they’re getting better. We protected better. The biggest thing was that we didn’t have the stupid penalties that resulted in us being 3rd and 10, 3rd and 12, or 3rd and 15. I think you look out there and see that o-line, and we’re playing Oklahoma, and you’ve got [Josh] Malin and [Xavier] Newman and [Sam Tecklenburg], and none of those three guys were playing offensive line for us, even in the spring. And the right side, you’ve got [Blake] Blackmar and Pat [Lawrence], who have played a lot of football. And they’re all coming back next year. They’re all getting better, and they’re all working, so I was pleased with the development that they’re making. We just have to find a way to run the ball. You watch Kansas State and see this is a physical and rugged defense, so we’re going to have to take another huge step to match their physicality.”

**On how Xavier Newman played…**   
“The thing about Xavier [Newman] is that he’s a really competitive person. He wants to be physical. He wants to get the last shove. He has that demeanor and that personality that you’re looking for on the offensive line. I thought he went in there and made some mistakes and some good plays, and he’ll only get better from there. It’s a good place to start from. His base is good, so we just have to continue to develop him as we move forward.”

**On if Newman could be a center down the road…**  
“Yeah, he’s got the capabilities to, kind of like [Sam] Tecklenberg. He’s taken some reps there, at guard and at center. He’s not 6’4”, so when he goes to play in the NFL someday he’ll probably play at center, but he’s got explosiveness, and the main thing is his demeanor. He’s got a tough guy demeanor, which you like to have up front.”

**On area of improvement he was most pleased with…**  
“The receivers and third down on offense. On defense, we continued to be excellent on third down. I think we had them at 4 of 10; not excellent but pretty good. I was really pleased with the receivers—going up and catching the football, getting open, making plays down the field, and even Tony [Nicholson] in the return game. I think their commitment to being dynamic was what we were looking for earlier and it finally came through. Now the challenge for them is whether to relax or take it to another level. Especially with Chris [Platt] being out, we’re hoping they take it to another level as a corps.”

**On balance between needing positive momentum and acknowledging the loss…**  
“I mean that’s why I treat wins and losses the same. There’s truth behind all of it. There are some things we got better at, and there are some things we got a lot worse at. We’re not tackling on defense. If we tackle, we might’ve won the football game. I can tell you this, the coaches on defense and the players on defense are not walking out feeling like they went toe to toe on the field. Either guys are making a decision not to do their job, or we’re getting out-physicaled away from winning the football game. And the offensive line can’t be happy right now, rushing for 60 yards. And the backs can’t be either. I think the way we process is to every day look at what you’re doing right, what you’re doing wrong, and try to get better at it. We have not played to our capabilities yet, and we won’t all year. We’ll continue to get better and better and better, but there’s something always out there we can get. I want them to feel good about that we played a little better on offense. We didn’t play a little better on defense. We played better against Duke than we did against Oklahoma. We just have to keep pushing ourselves forward, and when we win, I’ll still be the same way. I’ll say “we’re still not doing this right, but we’re doing this better,” and just trying to keep moving the team forward.”

**On if he would have been upset if players were happy in the locker room after a loss…**

“Yeah, I would have been, but they weren’t. They were beat up and torn up. The biggest thing when you lose is, how many times can you keep getting up off the mat and coming back the next week and rededicating yourself to that week and trying to win that week? That’s what I’m proud of these guys about. They got down early and just fought. They got up against Duke, then got down and kept fighting. That’s all I want to see from them is just, each week, a complete and total commitment to this week, trying to beat Kansas State, and doing everything possible each and every day to beat Kansas State. Then we’ll go into the bye week and come out and do that for our next opponent. Right now, we’re in this phase. When we get on to the phase where we’re on a run, and we win a game, two games, three games, and four games, that commitment to each and every week, to the details of the week, that’s to me what allows you to win long term.”

**On Terence Williams’ impact last week and moving forward…**

“I think he’s pretty healthy. He should be ready to go this week. He got some carries. It kind of became a passing game which really isn’t where we want to utilize him, and we’re hopeful that we can run the football and kind of get him going this week. I thought it was a good first step, introduction back into playing, and now hopefully we can amplify his carries and his productions this week.”

**On potentially moving Blake Lynch back to offense with Platt out…**

“Yeah, I would love to, I just think he’s playing too well over there. Really at the end of the day, they hit one deep ball on a tipped ball down the sideline. I thought our corners, when we played man, held up really well. Our safeties had a harder time, but our corners held up well. I think maybe we could use a package with Blake [Lynch] here at some point, but I think really Blake, Harrison Hand, and Grayland [Arnold] coming back, that’s what’s giving us a chance to win. The fact that they’re covering at a high level.”

**On differences in preparing for K-State…**

“Well, I just think the commitment to the quarterback runs. One of the reasons why we like, in our offense, having, even if we don’t use it a ton, the I-formation because our kids are used to seeing downhill, physical football all the time, so they’re prepared for it. They present challenges. The biggest thing is not what they do, it’s how they do it. They are just physical, and they’re going to run you over and knock you down and run you over and challenge your eyes. You get out of your gap or you do your own thing, and the quarterback pulls the ball and runs. They just challenge you with their physicality and their attention to detail. I don’t know if it’s as much for us scheme, although it is a difficult scheme, as much as, ‘are we going to go out there and not get pushed around? Are we going to go out there and especially in the fourth quarter, not get pushed around in the fourth quarter?’ They want it to be a fourth quarter game. They’re exactly the type of team that I love to watch. They’re going to throw body blows, body blows and say in the fourth quarter that you’re going to flinch before they do. Our team knows that going in. Our team knows that we’ve had the ball with a chance to win in every game in the fourth quarter, and we haven’t come through yet. We know that this is exactly the type of team that they are, so we have got to get just a little bit tougher and pay a little more attention to detail this week a little bit better, and hope that that’ll be enough, especially with them coming off of a bye.”

**On the opportunity to go against Coach Snyder in his stadium…**

“That’s a lot to think about right there. Well I still have some of my first coaching books from 20 years ago, and there’s chapters written by him. I’ve always had a reverence and respect for the gentlemen coaches that came before us, the guys that do it right. You see Coach Grobe at the game on Saturday. That’s the kind of coach that I respect, and guys who coach the game right, play the game right. I was up at ESPN and Coach Snyder pulled me aside and put his arm around me and said a few words to me.

We’re going to compete against each other, but really at the end of the day, having a chance to compete against Coach Snyder makes me better, and make me look at myself and how I do what I do. I think the way he runs his program is exactly the way I want to run this program, and any program I’m associated with. Doing things the right way on and off the field, and the way they play. It’ll be an honor to be out there with him, and I look forward to shaking his hand before and after the game.”

**On preparing for Jesse Ertz after already facing mobile quarterbacks…**

“Well yeah, we’ve prepared for two running quarterbacks the past two weeks. That’s a different style of running, but we’ve had to prepare for Baker [Mayfield] last weekend and Daniel Jones the week before. I think we’ve done a pretty decent job. This is much more of a zone-read, power run game with the quarterback, and he can throw it just as well, so we really have to hold up. One of the things we’re doing right now on defense is, ‘my bad. I’m supposed to be in that gap, and I’m not.’ When you face really good teams they hurt you for 99 yards. This is another team like that where if the guy who has the quarterback doesn’t play the quarterback, he’s out. We have to maintain our aggressiveness while also having tremendous attention to detail, because if not, they will hurt you.”

**On pinpointing problems on big runs…**

“There’s really two things that are happening. Number one, someone just doesn’t do what they’re supposed to do. The second thing is, when the ball gets to the secondary, the safeties have to get it down. We have to tackle it. On a lot of those long runs, there’s guys that are having a chance to make the play, and we’re just not making the play, not getting the ball down, not pushing them out of bounds. They’re tight roping down the sideline. I think our guys think he’s out of bounds, and they slow down. The next thing you know, it goes for 40. They threw a great go ball to their tight end. They got the ball down to four-yard line and he jumped up over our safety. I can live with that all day. If the kid makes a play, the kid makes a play. It’s just more our attention to detail and how we fit into the overall defensive scheme, and then, at the end of the day, getting the ball down. When a play pops, go tackle it. Two games now in a row where they’ve had long runs where they made a guy miss and ran. We just have to become a little bit better of a tackling team this week than we were last week.”

**On confidence in Connor Martin on long field goals…**

“I just said to myself, because he had missed the extra point the week before, and he missed that first field goal, I just said to myself, ‘if I don’t put him out there now, then I’ll never put him out there.’ So we put him out there, and he nailed it. He did it with confidence. It’s like my golf game. I hear Siravo say to him, ‘hey just kick it like a PAT when it’s from that far out.’ I thought he went out and he nailed it. Now he’s getting some recognition this week which is nice. I mean we practice it, and he makes them in practice. When you play a team like that, if you’re supposed to kick it, then kick it. It’s either going to go through the uprights or it’s not. He came through in a big way for us.”