**Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule**

**Weekly Press Conference**

**October 10, 2017**

**Opening Statement…**
“It’s great to see everybody, thank you for coming today. Obviously, we’re very excited to get back to playing football. We’re happy to have a chance to play the No. 14 team in the country—a tremendous team in Oklahoma State. I feel like our team took some steps over the bye week. I feel like a couple guys got healthy, and I think our mentality is continuing to get tougher. We’re growing up a little bit, and hopefully we’ll continue to be a better team than we were last week.

Before I go on, I know this is late, I want to thank the Baylor fans and parents that came out to Kansas State. That’s not an easy trip, but we had a great contingent, and I was grateful for them. My wife mentioned it to me after the game, and it was really good to see. Even though we lost the football game, our players went down and thanked them in person and on the field. We’re grateful for them and we’re grateful for all the people that are going to travel to Oklahoma State and help us as we go into hostile territory.

I also want to make sure I thank all the high school coaches, administrators, teachers, and all the people that allowed us to go on the road recruiting Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Our staff did not take a break. We worked on football until Wednesday and then headed out on the road to see the next generation and the next crop of Baylor football players. And I will just say this—the response was overwhelming from the coaches in Texas. I know there was a lot of questions from a lot of people about how my staff and I would resonate with the coaches in Texas, and I think, with the adversity that we’ve been through, we’ve been able to build some real connections with a lot of the coaches in the state of Texas. I think a lot of those guys know what we’re going through. They know the work that we’re putting in. They know that, despite losing, we’re still trying to do a great job with their players and their student-athletes, and how we’re always putting them first. That bond is only getting stronger. We weren’t allowed to talk to the kids when we were out there, but we’re really pleased with where recruiting is.

I think there are a lot of young men that see this isn’t a staff that’s afraid to play young players. We’re not afraid to play a lot of guys on defense. We’re playing 22 or 25 out there on defense. And we’re playing a lot of guys on offense, and even though we’re not consistent offensively, we are leading the nation in big plays. We have the nation’s leading touchdown receiver. I think there are kids on offense and defense that are excited about where we’re headed, so it was really good to get out on the road recruiting. So we’re grateful to them. I’m proud of our kids. We worked really hard last week and then took a couple days this weekend to go back home, see our families and regenerate, and now we have a seven-game stretch to go become a really good football team. A lot of guys got better, a lot of guys worked hard, and it’ll be a tremendous challenge to go to Stillwater and play Oklahoma State, who has as good an offense as you’ll see in the country. I think they’re No. 2 in total offense and No. 2 in scoring offense. James Washington is a dynamic playmaker. Mason Rudolph is accurate. And more importantly than anything else, he’s calling the game with the line and getting them the right play. He looks like a pro quarterback. And what’s not talked about enough is their run game, which is fantastic. They do a great job up front with a physical, rugged offensive line, and Justice Hill is really a special back for a sophomore. It’ll be a challenge for our defense.

I think sometimes our defensive kids think we’re playing better defense than we have been in the past, but the way we’re playing defense still isn’t good enough. We want to be a top 25 defense. We’re certainly not anywhere close to that right now, and that’s only going to happen if we stop the run. We’re not just trying to limit the points and win in shootouts. So we’ve got to stop the run, which is no easy challenge this week. We’ve got to limit the explosive plays, which Oklahoma State is dynamic at. Their ability to throw and catch the deep ball is fantastic. And we have to generate turnovers. We’re minus-five for the year, and we only have one interception. We’ve got good players in the secondary, so we have to have more interceptions and more forced fumbles than we have right now. Those are the things defensively that I know Phil [Snow] and his staff are looking towards.

Offensively, we’re going to have a challenge going up against this defense. They’ve got some different looks. They’re really, really multiple. Coach does a tremendous job of putting you in a bunch of different positions where you have to have a veteran group that can get in the right play versus the right defense. They’ve got some really talented defensive players, my favorite of which is DeQuinton Osborne. I think he’s one of the best defensive linemen in the Big 12. I love the way he plays, and I look forward to shaking his hand after the game. Offensively, while we’ve been explosive and made the big plays, we’ve gotten much better at third down in the last two weeks. We’ve got to find a way to generate some sort of consistency on the ground, and that includes eliminating the penalties. I showed our team that when we don’t have a penalty, we’re scoring a touchdown about 46 percent of the time, which is not bad, but when we do have a penalty on offense, we’re scoring a touchdown about 24 percent of the time, so it’s the discipline on offense to go into enemy territory and not have penalties that will allow us to score about twice as much. That seems simple when you think about it, but it’s hard to do. So that’s what we’re pushing our team forward with, and hopefully with Ish Wainright, Jordan Feuerbacher, and JaMycal Hasty coming back, we should be able to get a few more vets out there that can handle that sort of an environment. So, with that, I’ll see what kind of questions you guys have.”

**On if this is as healthy as Baylor has been since the start of the season…**
“Yeah, in many ways, we are, but we have a lot of guys that are banged up from the season. This is a man’s game, and it’s about who can play through the bumps and bruises when they don’t feel 100%. It is nice to have some of those guys back. We’ll see what kind of role Ish Wainright will play after being out for a while, coming back from mono. Jordan [Feuerbacher] has been playing with that cast, which isn’t talked about enough. The sacrifice that Feuerbacher has made playing with that broken hand in a cast, but now he can go out and we can start throwing the ball to the tight end again. Rob Saulin got hurt, so he’ll have his shoulder cleaned up. Thankfully, the rule in the NCAA is that if you play in no more than four of the first six games, you can apply for a redshirt for that season. Rob played in four games and will have surgery, so he’ll have that experience of playing this year, but he’ll have a chance to play next year as well after the surgery. But probably, yeah, we are about as healthy as we have been since the start of the year in terms of bodies that are out there playing for us.”

**On if the amount of freshmen playing is comparable to his first year at Temple and the challenges with that…**
“Everything is the first time in a lot of ways. When they go on the road to Kansas State and the atmosphere is electrifying, that’s the first time. So we’ll do it this week, but it’s the second time. You just don’t have that wisdom. We tell our guys that you can learn from wisdom or experience. Wisdom is when you learn from the mistakes of others, and experience is when you learn from your own mistakes. Most of us, when mom says don’t do something and you do it anyway, learn from our own experience, and we’re making a lot of mistakes that are causing us to lose. The nice thing is, they’re young, so they learn from them and you teach them and you don’t panic. You just keep teaching and hope that when they’re sophomores and juniors and seniors, they win a lot of games, and that’s what happened at Temple.

Those kids that lost on a Hail Mary to Fordham and lost on a 4th-and-12 to Rutgers ended up beating everybody, pretty much, because they had learned from tough losses. As bad as the record is, and as much as we don’t like our record right now, we’ve had the ball in the 4th quarter with the chance to take the lead or tie in every football game. So we’re not losing by 20 points, and we’re not losing by 25 points. I think our average margin of defeat right now is nine points. So how do you make up those nine points? Well, it’s all the little mistakes, and they’re everywhere. [Sam Tecklenburg] got on the bus after the last game and he looked like he had seen a ghost from that snap, and I told him there were about 100 plays that could’ve changed the outcome of that game. So, we believe that there are five or six plays in every game that are going to give us a chance to win or lose, and we just haven’t won those five or six plays. When they’re freshmen, if they don’t listen to everyone else when they say “do this or that differently” and just focus on doing things better and get good at doing that, they’ll keep growing, and eventually, we’ll have a house built on rock. That’s the hard part about freshmen, but that’s the exhilarating part as well. I’m tired of people texting me and telling me to hang in there and asking me if I’m okay. I’m great. We’re teaching young kids that need to be taught, and we’re taking them through one of the most adverse times of their life, and we’re trying to do it in a really positive way and a really truthful way. Y’all come to practice and see that I coach really hard at practice. Maybe I’ll be really nice when the cameras are there, but we’re coaching really hard, and we’re teaching them how to play the game the right way. It’s frustrating now, but you’re going to look out there one day and Jalen Pitre is going to know how to do everything right.

We’re fighting right now for Taylor Young, Davion Hall and Mo Porter. We want them to go out on top, because Taylor and those seniors have done a lot of great things for us, but the biggest thing that they’re going to do is teach our freshmen how to win. We’re learning how to lose right now, and how not to lose eventually. So we learned how to lose and now we’re learning how not to lose and we’re getting better. Now we’ve got to go learn how to win, and that’s really hard to do. Unless you’re way better than the other team, it’s really hard to win in college football, and our kids are learning it the right way. We have the leadership of the older guys and the youth of the young guys, so that’s why I’m having a great time doing this—I really am. I’m having a great time doing this. Our coaches are having a great time doing this. You can see the light go on in a couple more kids’ eyes each and every week, and as I see the light go on for Denzel Mims and Jordan Williams, I say to myself, “Just keep getting more and more kids have the switch go off.” And that’s the hard part about playing freshmen, but that’s what we did at Temple. I don’t like to talk about Temple too much, but a lot of scouts here talk about freshmen on that team who are playing in the NFL. There’s the first round draft pick, but there are a lot of free agents and seventh round kids that go to the Steelers and become special teams captains, and they were freshmen and sophomores on the teams that lost. So they’re the ones texting me and telling me that we’ve been through this before. The whole point for these young kids is to push through it. BJ Thompson, Demarco Artis—and I think you asked me about Demarco yesterday; he practiced with the varsity yesterday and we’re hoping he can go this week—just get them out there and let them play, make mistakes and grow, and keep coaching them every step along the way.”

**On if Rajah Preciado and Verkedric Vaughns starting at safety was due to injuries…**
“Well, Verkedric [Vaughns] has played really well, and he’s practiced really well. Rajah [Preciado] has been playing in our dime package. Chris Miller has been banged up, so he didn’t play against Kansas State. He got hurt in the middle of the game against Oklahoma. We’re hopeful that he can practice today. I always do this based off of if we played today, but I think he might be able to go. Taion [Sells] got banged up in the Kansas State game and didn’t practice last week, but I’m hopeful that he can practice today. So we’ve been playing a committee of guys at safety anyway, so I’m hopeful that some of those guys can go. [Davion Hall] is questionable for this week, Chris Miller is questionable, Taion Sells is questionable, all those guys are questionable physically this week coming out of those Oklahoma and Kansas State games, not after anything that happened last week.”

**On Hasty and Williams’ status and the running back situation…**

“Well we’ll start [John] Lovett. He’s growing, but I think that long run showed what he can do. I think [Trestan] Ebner has done a nice job as kind of our third down back, picking up the blitzes. JaMycal [Hasty] is going to full today. He practiced last week, limited and then he practiced today, so we think JaMycal is ready to go, and if so, we’re going to use him. Terence [Williams] is sort of coming along. I think he’s getting healthier now, so we have four backs that are up and ready. Who we use the most will probably depend on who practices the best, and once we get into the game, we’ll try to go with the hot hand if there’s somebody that’s playing at a high, high level. Like I thought Lovett hit a couple nice little runs last game, and that’s why I put him back in instead of some of the other backs late in the game, and then he hit that 85-yarder. It just looked like that he was game, he was seeing it. So, we’ll get into the game and see who’s feeling it, who’s seeing it, and we have to do a good job as coaches of trying to get those guys into a rhythm by giving them the football a little bit more than what we have.”

**On K.J. Smith’s status…**

“K.J. [Smith] is out now, and he’ll probably be out for a while. He’s getting better which is good, but that’s not like a contact injury. That’s just repetition of him moving around and stuff on his legs, leading to shin splints and possibly stress fractures. We’re just trying to make sure we take care of him for his future, and don’t hurt him. We don’t want to rush anybody back, and we certainly don’t want to rush K.J. back with that injury. We’re just getting him healthy. I think the doctors are doing a really good job with him. Hopefully, maybe he’ll come back at the end of the year, and if not, we want to make sure we leave him out there as healthy as he can be.”

**On Deonte Williams playing several different positions…**

“You don’t really want to take a kid from mike to defensive end, from defensive end to sam, and then take him from sam back to defensive end, but that’s kind of where we are. His end position, we think he’s going to be a really good pass rusher at some point, and be a really good defensive end. Deonte [Williams] has a lot of talent. It’s him understanding the importance of playing hard, the urgency of details, the importance of being where you’re supposed to be. It’s all those sort of ‘young guy’, ‘redshirt freshman’ sort of things that we just need him to accelerate. But Deonte can be and will be at some point a difference maker for the football team. He’s had some really good moments. We moved him to sam just because Terrel Bernard hurt his foot, and we needed somebody to go out there and he had done it before. His home position is to play defensive end. We’ll need him this week.”

**On difficulty for Blake Lynch moving to corner…**

“I think Blake Lynch moving in one week to corner and then the level of play that he’s played at, you know the first play of the game against Duke, they tried to throw a post on him, that’s one of the unsung stories to me of this football team. Just a guy that really played quarterback in high school. I mean he might have played a little defensive back. We talked about playing him at linebacker even. To go over and play corner in this league and to play at the level that he’s playing at is just a credit to him. It’s a credit to Francis Brown, the defensive backs coach because he works with him constantly. But I think Blake has really, really saved the football team because not a lot of guys would have done that. Then we get some injuries on offense. [Chris] Platt’s gone, and you say to yourself, ‘sure would love to have Blake over there.’ We put him in for two snaps on offense against Kansas State as well. He’s playing on special teams. What he’s doing is so hard to do. Not many people can go from not even having played corner, go from receiver, and go over and play corner, and play at the level that he’s played at. It’s truly, really just a credit to Blake, and just his toughness and his competitiveness. Sometimes I talk about being tough, and people want to know what I mean. I want Blake Lynch. He just goes out there and competes no matter what, and if you beat him he gets angry. He doesn’t make excuses. He doesn’t shrink. He goes out there and continues to try to do it. He’s really a positive story to me on this football team.”

**On what Clay Johnston has meant to the team…**

“I think Clay [Johnston] has been a real bright spot defensively, and made some impact plays. I think the Duke game he made a ton of impact plays. You see him getting more and more comfortable. You look back at last year, and he was really playing defensive end kind of rushing off the edge. This is his first time being in the middle, and I think he’s playing really well. He broke his hand in the Kansas State game, casted it up, and went out there and was trying to tackle with one hand in a cast. He had surgery Tuesday, and he’s out at practice yesterday. That’s the type of kid we’re talking about. He comes from a great family. His dad’s a long time veteran NFL strength coach. His dad’s been through it. His mom’s been through it. He comes from a family that he knows how to work. He knows how to play the game. Clay just tries to get better each and every day, and you can coach him as hard as you want. By him allowing us to coach him, you see his play get better and better and better. Mike Siravo has had Luke Kuechly, he’s had [Tyler] Matakevich. He knows how to coach guys that want to be coached. I think Clay will get better and better and better. I think he’s a future All-Big 12 player, and really an impact guy for us.”

**On what he learned from this group after player dismissals last week…**

“I just think that our players crave structure and discipline. There’s a lot of guys that do things right, and they just want to know that the other guys are, you know no one is going to be perfect, but they want to know that the guys are doing what they’re being asked to do. What we ask our players to do is really tough. We ask them to get up early. We ask them to take care of their bodies. We ask them to do the right things off the field in the community. We ask them to go to school and be good students, and when they don’t, we hold them accountable to it just like we hold our coaches accountable if they don’t do the right things. I think we have a really good group of kids that do things right, and they just want to know that everyone else in the locker room is in it with them. I was really pleased with our team last week. Unfortunately, a couple kids aren’t here, and they’re great kids. They’re going to continue to go to school. Other kids – I say kids, they’re really young men – they make mistakes. So, we’ll just try to deal with it, and bring them back, and try to make sure that when guys leave here as seniors that they’re the best man, the best student, and the best football player that they can be. We have a lot of guys trying to do that.”

**On what it shows him when players play through getting banged up…**

“Well, we have a lot of guys that are sacrificing how they feel for this team, and they’ll do whatever it takes for us to win and move forward. I think it shows that we have a lot of faith in our medical staff because as a coach I don’t want to put anybody out there that’s going to make themselves worse or injure themselves worse. We have great trainers, great doctors that say that if they can go they go, but if they can’t go we don’t want them to go. We have a lot of kids like Clay [Johnston], like Taylor [Young] that are willing to play through the bumps and the bruises and in some cases, the breaks in order to help the team win. Really at the end of the end of the day, if you’re a football player, if you’re a competitor, you love to win, you love to go out there and compete. You love to go out there and play against somebody. When you have a chance to get in the game, you don’t want to come out of that game for anything. When I was in the NFL I saw that first-hand. You see guys crawling to the training room on Mondays to get their bodies right, then they come back and play on Sunday. When you see guys like Clay, guys like Taion [Sells] out there just fighting to get themselves healthy so they can go play as well as they can for Baylor, it’s inspiring. It makes you as a coach want to work harder, and do a better job for them so that they can taste the fruits of their labor.”

**On his thoughts on Josh Gordon’s admission about drug testing during his time at Baylor…**

“I saw that before I got here. I think [media relations director] Taylor [Bryan] came running up to my office to make sure I’d see it. No, but when I got here, [director of athletics] Mack [Rhoades] had already instilled – I shouldn’t say Mack – the university as part of the recommendations had already started a very robust drug testing program. When that happens, there’s no decisions by coaches. It’s standardized, and it’s protocol. As coaches, its people across campus. What they’ve done is they’ve done a nice job of standardizing that. At the same time, I believe in drug testing, and I don’t believe in it to catch kids and get them in trouble, but to keep kids from behaviors that are going to lead to lives that they don’t want to lead. I don’t want kids to pick up habits here that lead to them not being successful later on in life. I can tell you we drug tested before the Kansas State game on Thursday, and drug tested Sunday after the Kansas State game. Not many people do that, but we do that because we want to make sure that our kids are being successful, having an excuse to say no and do the right thing. When I hear things and I see things that happen in the NFL, I’m just grateful for our staff. That our staff, we don’t look at ourselves as football coaches whose only job is to win, though it is our job to win. But we look at ourselves as we’re supposed to help these kids make sure that they have the most successful life they can, so we believe in accountability, and I believe in consequences. I believe in tough conversations. I believe in second chances. I believe in grace, but I also believe in justice. We’re trying to do that, but I think that they’ve done a really nice job here of making sure that there’s protocol, so that I can’t circumvent anything, which I wouldn’t do anyways.”

**On his plans at punter…**

“I’ve gotten emails. We had open tryouts. I think Connor [Martin] will be ready to go if we need him. Peter Webster has done it before, so he’s our backup. We’ll try one of those two guys. James Lynch is a freshman defensive tackle. He was an all-state punter. He just hasn’t done it, so I don’t know that he’d be ready to get ready this week. I think we’ll probably have to go with that plan of getting Connor going. We’ll see what Webster can do today. They’ll kind of duke it out. We’ll try to bring James along starting off in three or four games. I think Connor can do a good job. It’s just more the strain that puts on his leg of kicking off, punting, and doing field goals. That’s hard. We’d like to get someone to take one of those three jobs off his plate, but right now, if played today, he’d be out there doing all three.”

**On if Galitz would be eligible for a medical redshirt…**

“Technically no. You can play in four of the first six games. He kicked off the opening kickoff of the fifth game. The clock hadn’t even started yet, so technically no, but you never know. You can always file a waiver and hope that someone sees some merit to his season ending with no time run off the clock. We’ll see, but technically no. He’d be a senior next year based upon the rules.”

**On Mo Porter’s leadership…**

“I’m really pleased with Maurice Porter. The thing about Mo for a guy that hasn’t played a ton of football, he’s getting better. He didn’t play the whole Oklahoma game, and he came back and fought through the Kansas State game. So, I was proud of him for playing feeling banged up, and I’m hopeful that he can be full strength against Oklahoma State which we’ll need him to be. I’m really pleased with his decision making off the field. You can see him making mature decisions and, in doing so, being a leader to the guys because I think they’ve always respected Mo and they want to hear what he has to say because I think has great thoughts. But he’s living what he says, and that’s a really good thing. I think, hopefully down this stretch, we can see Mo play his best football and hopefully go on to be a pro player, but I’m proud of him. He’s going to graduate. He’s doing the right things off the field and playing through some nagging injuries, but I think he’s playing pretty well. I think what he’s doing is he’s allowing us to bring [Josh] Malin along who I think is going to be a really special offensive tackle. So, I think he’s doing a good job.”