**Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule**

**Weekly Press Conference**

**October 17, 2017**

*Opening Statement…*
“Well, first of all, I appreciate everybody being here and coming out to listen about our players. We’re looking forward to our homecoming game against a tremendous West Virginia team. I think, for our guys, Saturday obviously did not go the way we wanted, but we do have another opportunity this week, and that’s a tremendous opportunity to get better and go play football. And most importantly, we have a chance to come home after a month away and play in front of our fans and all the people that believe in our kids and in our program. I know, for that, we’re extremely excited. I was proud of our players in that tough environment on Saturday. I thought they came out and competed at a high level early. The game got away from us, and if there’s something we have to correct, it’s avoiding that feeling of “oh here we go again” when one bad play leads to three bad plays. As we continue to work on their psyche and continue to work on the way they look at the game, that can’t happen. We can never get used to losing. We can never allow those thoughts to enter our brains, because bad thoughts lead to bad actions.

I did think that they finished the game the right way. I know they’re hurting and beat up and mentally struggling in terms of wondering why this is happening and why we’re going through this. I said to our players this is probably one of the toughest times of their lives. The last six regular season games last year didn’t go the way they wanted, but they found a way to win the bowl game. Then our new staff comes in and we’re asking them to do so many things that are different and harder, in school and study hall and football. And they’re doing all these things that are harder and so hard to do, and they’re not getting the results that they want, so it’s natural to ask why. Why are we doing this? Why isn’t it working? And my message to our kids is simple. It hasn’t worked yet on the scoreboard but there are a lot of guys playing significantly better football. There are a lot of players that are significantly better. There’s improvement all around, and we’re not going to lose forever, so there’s going to be a day when we win. The biggest thing right now is that our players are going through this tough time, probably one of the toughest times of their lives, and how they go through it. It’s what they learn from it. It’s how they emerge from it. And if they attack it and don’t blame other people and continue to press forward, then they’ll say “I was one of the mentally toughest players in college football.”

I said it after the game; these kids are unbelievably mentally tough. They’ve been through a lot, and they continue to fight and scratch and claw, and I’m proud of those guys that go out and represent us on Saturdays. I hope our fans come out and cheer for our kids. I hope our fans go to the Bear Walk and slap those kids on the back, because those kids, even in the last two weeks, have endured a lot, and continue to show up and represent their school with pride.

I’m excited for us to bring a ton of recruits here this Saturday, and I want them to see what Baylor football and Baylor University and Baylor Nation is all about. I had one of the best recruits at the Oklahoma game say to me that seeing our crowd stand up and cheer for this team after losing—that outpouring of emotion and support for our time after a tough time—meant a lot to him. That’s what this is all about to me. We’re going through this tough time, but these players did not bring about this tough time. But they’re going through it. And they’re going through it in a tough way and they’re fighting through it. So I hope that everyone shows up there just to say “hey, we love you and support you,” because that’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to show up and fight our tails off.

I’m taking the whole team to the Homecoming Pep Rally on Friday night. I want them to see all the people that believe in them and support them and believe in Baylor. I want our recruits to see that if this is what it’s like when things are tough, imagine what it’s going to be like when things are great. If this is what it’s like when things are down, imagine the support you’re going to get when things are great. So, I think it’s a tremendous opportunity this weekend in recruiting, and it’s a tremendous opportunity for our players, and I’m hopeful that we can go out and compete at a high level.

This is an outstanding team we’re playing in West Virginia with a great offense. Will Grier is fantastic, Coach Holgorsen does a great job, and David Sills is someone I’ve known for a long time, and they do a great job offensively. They came back down 34-17, or whatever it was, to beat Texas Tech. It was just an impressive game, and they really should’ve beaten TCU. You can tell they’re one of the best teams in the Big 12. Defensively, they create a bunch of havoc. It was a hard fought game last year at their place that they were able to pull out. It’ll be a tremendous battle and a great opportunity for us, so we’ll see how we bounce back from last week. But I just wanted to make sure I said all that.

And the last thing I’ll say is this: I think it’s important to put things in perspective. My wife and son and two daughters and her father and Coach Siravo’s wife and their three children and their babysitter all piled into a 15-passenger van and drove to Oklahoma City, stayed in Oklahoma City, and drove to the game. My son is the eternal optimist. He’s been through this before, so he recognizes that losing breeds toughness which breeds winning. And he’s 12. He’s sitting there at the game with my father-in-law, who is in a wheelchair, so they’re in the wheelchair section. So they’re kind of all around Oklahoma State fans. So my son’s cheering, and we’re getting our tail kicked, but he just keeps cheering the whole time, because he doesn’t just cheer when we’re winning. He doesn’t just cheer when the score is in our favor. He cheers because his players are on the field. He cheers because he’s there to cheer for Eric Ogor and Clay Johnston no matter what. And I know that’s kind of uncool, and someone might’ve said something to him or whatever, so my son made his way over and was able to sit by the band. And my wife said after the game about how unbelievably powerful the impact our band had on my son with how positive the kids in the band are. Just how relentlessly supportive they were during that game. Even when we’re losing, they didn’t pull out their phones. You should see me watching the game on Thursday night; I pulled out my phone after like four plays. They just cheered for Baylor. And so, I want to go out on Saturday and I want to play really well for the band. I want to play really well for the Baylor Line, and we actually went out and stole a member of the Baylor Line to kick for us I guess, but I want to go out there and play really well for all the people that love and support us, because you find out who has your back in tough times. And there are so many people that have our back, and there are so many people that have our players’ backs. That’s the special thing about this place, so we want to make sure we go out and represent those people the right way. So, with that, that was a long opening statement so I apologize, but I’ll see what you guys have for me.”

*On if West Virginia offense looks a lot like Oklahoma State…*
“Yeah, very much so. They have great receivers, just like Oklahoma State has great receivers. They run the football and are rugged up front. This is another one that’s going to take what you give them. At the end of the day, Oklahoma State did a great job of, if you gave them a run box, they ran the football, and if you dropped a safety down or played man-to-man, they threw the ball outside. What I do know is that our cornerbacks, Grayland Arnold, Blake Lynch, Harrison Hand, and Jameson Houston, are going to show up to play on Saturday. I know that. Those guys are tough kids and it was a tough day. It wasn’t just a tough day for them; it was a tough day for everybody. But they’re sort of in the spotlight, and they’re anxious to play. Between [Ka’raun] White and [David] Sills, they have great receivers as well, and you have to play well in the back end if you want to have a chance.”

*On evaluating the development of the secondary…*
“That’s a great question. I’d say, culturally, we’re kind of used to getting hurt. Do you know what I’m saying? That’s one of the things that over time will change. That’s one of the things of players asking, “Coach, why do we practice the way we practice?” Well, Sean Chandler started every game for me for three years. I’m used to guys not saying going down and having the next guy go in, so we’ve got to kind of move them past that, but I do think guys have developed. I think one of the hard things about playing corner is that you have to have a game where you get beat, and it stinks. And you get beat a couple times. And you come in on Sunday, and either you’re done, shell-shocked, and never come back again, or you come in on Sunday and say, “That ain’t happening again.” And that’s Grayland Arnold. Grayland Arnold is out there with a cast on his hand because he broke his arm, and he knocks the ball out. I think they’ve gotten better, but we’re just not playing great all the time in the back end. And really it shows up more in the run game with tackling. If we just tackle a little bit better in the open field, maybe in the safety and corner positions, that’s not that game. All those long plays are plays where you say, “there’s no way that play will ever work,” and it did, just because their kid made a play and our kid didn’t. What do we do? We don’t complain about it. We just continue to develop our players and get them to go make those tackles, and continue to recruit guys that are going to make those tackles. So I’d say that they’ve gotten better. As I said to a couple of guys, we are the team that lost to Liberty and gave up 600 yards against Liberty, but we did hang in there against Oklahoma. We are getting better. It’s just not where it needs to be. So what do you do? You keep getting better. You keep coaching. I think Harrison Hand, although he got beat one time this week, has gotten better and better and better. Really, I think it’s our revolving door at safety. It’s been hard for us to get any sort of continuity, and tackling at safety has hurt us. I think that’s been the biggest thing since Duke, where a lot of our explosive plays are happening.”

*On getting over 200 yards rushing...*
"I was really pleased. We've worked really hard. That's been a point of emphasis just with the way we're practicing. To me, I think that's a commitment from our defense. On our scout team defense we have guys like Will Jones and James Lockhart transferred in from A&M and Cole Maxwell, and we really practiced the run game, and we're trying to get better at it. Kind of similar to our defensive backs, we've had to shift our offensive line lineup. You have to report to the officials anytime you change someone's number, so I had to go to them like five times on Saturday and say “Okay Josh Malin is now moving from tight end back to tackle, and now he's going from tackle back to tight end.” Mo went down and then X (Xavier Jones) got beat, so we got a little bit beat up on the O-line. If there's any position that shows the progress we've made and commitment to the process of getting better, it's been the O-Line. I think Terence was really fantastic on Saturday. He played a great game. [John] Lovett played a great game early, and [Trestan] Ebner popped a couple runs, which we couldn't really get [JaMycal Hasty] loose. I thought those guys, really overall, the tight ends really stepped up. Had that score not gotten away from us, I think we would have probably gotten up near 300 yards. We would have continued to be able to run the football, but it got away and we kind of had to change how we were playing. I just think Terence [Williams] played a really good game. You could see that he's coming along. He wanted to continue to play, and I pulled him out with that shoulder. I didn't want to get him banged up for no reason. Hopefully we can continue that versus a good West Virginia defense.”

*On WVU quarterback Will Grier…*“I think the thing about [Will] Grier is that he doesn’t just throw it. He can run and he’s really intelligent. The things that they ask them to do, or it looks like, ‘Hey run box run it, passing box throw it.’ And then see all that. They have all the RPOs built in. He was a good player at Florida, and he’s a really good player now. He can beat you with his feet. He can pull the ball down and run. He can beat you with his head, and he can beat you with his arms. That’s four great quarterbacks in a row that we’ve seen. That’s the Big 12--great, great quarterbacks. I also like his toughness, his moxie. You can tell he’s a kind of guy that you want to go win with.”

*On if the receiving corps continues to step up each week…*“It was unfortunate, on Saturday, that we were depleted at receiver. You take from our initial group of receivers: Blake Lynch is playing defense now, Chris Platt was hurt, and [Denzel] Mims had the flu and wasn’t able to do much on Saturday. Our plan was to run the ball and get the ball in Mims’ hands, but he was sick and couldn’t get going. Pooh Stricklin got hurt and will probably be out this week, so really Tony [Nicholson] became the viable guy to go make some plays happen. I was pleased with Tony. He and I are a work in progress, and we’re learning how to coexist, and I was really proud of him. I’ve challenged him a ton. We were behind and he wasn’t pouting, even though he didn’t touch the ball early on very much. He didn’t complain, and he just competed until the end of the game. I’m very proud of Tony, and I think that’ll accentuate his role now, especially with Pooh probably being out, I don’t know 100%. I think Tony will have to become a bigger factor in our passing game.”

*On West Virginia’s style of offense...*
“I think they use the whole field. They’re explosive in terms of getting the ball in playmakers’ hands. They see what defense you’re in and they’ll violate that defense. They’ll give you something that looks like “Hey this is this route,” and then they’ll do a double move off of it, so you have to be so disciplined in the back end. And even when you see the route and you know what it is, you’re kind of afraid to go make a play. I think the biggest thing, from studying what they’re doing, is that they’re committed to running the football. They’re going to run the football. I think it’s really well put together and really well-designed, and they have a toughness about them. This is one of the teams that I grew up knowing, being a Penn State guy. West Virginia has always had a toughness. My wife’s dad and mom both went to West Virginia. Their teams have always had a toughness. So, for a spread offense, their receivers block. For a spread offense, their quarterback is going to take hits and play hard, and they’re going to run the football. So I think it’s a nice mix of both.”

*On John Lovett and Mo Porter’s injury status…*
“[Mo] Porter will go. Porter is good to go. [John] Lovett, I’ll have to see after today’s practice. He didn’t do anything yesterday, but that was by design, so I’m hopeful he can do something today. He’d be questionable for the game.”

*On if his in-laws are rooting for Baylor this week…*
“Oh yeah. My father-in-law is actually with us, and I told him he could stay with us, but there would be some rules.”

*On how Baylor’s offense compares to rest of Big 12…*
“I probably won’t be able to say for a year or two. Someone asked me on the conference call yesterday about our change in offense, but really every week it’s a matter of who is healthy. Last week, our receivers were all banged up, but [Jordan] Feuerbacher was back, so we came out with two tight ends. But late in the game, we were spread out. The one thing we want to do is be able to run the football. The thing that’s been nice is that Zach [Smith] has really emerged. Guys were dropping the ball a lot and running the wrong routes on Saturday, and it wasn’t a great day in the passing game, but I think we saw that Zach will stay in there and make big time throws when he can. We’re a work in progress while we get all those people. If I could go back a month ago, I’d say we would be in four-wides a lot with [Chris] Platt and Blake [Lynch] and Pooh [Stricklin] and Tony [Nicholson] and [Denzel] Mims, but as they’ve gotten hurt or had to go help us in other places, we’ve had to adapt. Our backs have been a pleasant surprise as [John] Lovett has emerged. When you watch this league, the things that the good teams have in common is that they have a great quarterback. At the end of the day, you can say it’s about systems, but when Kansas State has [Jesse] Ertz out there playing, they do it their way, but they’re really effective. Baker Mayfield is effective. Mason Rudolph is effective. Will Grier is effective. As we move forward, we’re going to build things around Zach [Smith] and around Charlie [Brewer] and make sure we put pieces around them that can go make plays, but we always want to find a way to run the football, much like West Virginia does.”

*On Connor Martin’s contributions this year…*
“Yeah, I mentioned that yesterday in our team meeting. We’ve coached him really hard, because in preseason he really struggled, but he’s emerged as one of the more consistent guys on our team. And to take over the punting duties, he’s done a really nice job punting, and we’re kicking field goals and kicking 45-yarders without even thinking about it. So he’s brought a consistency to us that has been nice. And I’d say it’s all been Connor’s hard work and mental toughness. He missed an extra point at Duke and a field goal at Oklahoma, but after that point, it’s clicked, and he’s said “I can do this.” So I’m really pleased with him. And I’m pleased that Jay [Sedwick] has emerged, so now he doesn’t have to do all three, because if he had to do all three, I think that would have an effect on him.”

*On how Galitz was originally going to be the long field goal kicker and how that’s changed…*“Connor [Martin] has gotten better. Connor has gotten more and more consistent. A lot of kids have the leg to kick long field goals, but they overthink it. It’s like when you try to over-hit a golf club and the ball goes way over there. But as Connor has made kicks, he’s grown more and more confident, and it’s like he’s hitting his pitching wedge, and he’s knocking the ball in from deeper. The one kick on Saturday, where that one guy ran in and should’ve blocked the kick, didn’t bother him. He just stayed calm and kicked the ball right through. And Connor was a guy in preseason that, if there was any pressure, he’d kick and stop. So I just love the way that he’s been focused and locked in. In the midst of things going on, you try to find guys getting better, and keep pushing those guys forward, so he’s been a good weapon for us.”

*On how relationship with David Sills and how that started…*
“He was at, I forget the name of the school, but he played for Coach Thomas, and they would bring their kids to camp so David [Sills] would come. He never participated in our camp because he was going to USC, but he would come over with the different kids from the school, so I just got to meet him a couple times and got to know him there, but not much past that. He’s someone that we knew as a player, and we watched him in 9th and 10th grade, and now he’s developed as a real weapon. He’s a real weapon. They do a great job of finding ways to give him the football and letting him be explosive, so I’m happy to see him at every game other than ours. I’m happy to see him play so well and become a good player and go through the journey that he’s been on. I use the word process, and talk about the process he’s been on: he’s been a quarterback, a tight end, a receiver, and now he’s playing his best football late, and that’s a credit to him.”

*On what he’s seen from Taion Sells and if he’s been a leader…*
“I think Taion [Sells] leads and tries to lead by example. I think he tries to lead by deed. He got banged up in the game with his shoulder and had to come out, but Taion is a guy that comes out and gives us effort. Taion is a guy who works hard every day, playing on special teams. We have a great senior group that is committed to fight to win every week, and make sure they leave here the way they want to leave here. I think Taion went through some adversity last year, breaking his foot, but he’s back now, and I think he’s trying to make the most of every day he’s had.”

*On if he had confidence in Jay Sedwick…*“Literally after the game, I started getting emails about “Hey, if you guys need someone, I’m here,” so we brought a couple kids out from campus, and they kicked and tried out. I had known Jay, even though I don’t think I had ever seen him at camp, but I think I knew his name. We had kind of hit our roster limit, and told him we’d see him in the spring, and he went out there and practiced, and then we brought him back on Tuesday, and said he could have a second tryout in practice with the bullets flying, and what else are you going to do? We put him in there. He’s kicking the ball, and the most impressive thing to me is that he kicked the ball and made that tackle down the right sideline. For a guy that loves defense, I love watching great tackling. Our tackling is what’s bad right now, so to see a great tackle by our kicker was exciting. It’s a great find for us, and credit to him. Really, he’s running the Baylor Line first game, and now he’s kicking off against Oklahoma State. It’s Chapter 4 in my book: From the Dorm to the Field. But you know what? The great thing about it, as I tell our players, as we go through adversity, is that we’ve got a guy who is going to kick off for us, probably for the next four years. You just keep finding things. In all the tough times, you just keep finding the kernel of truth that’s there and improve the team and find kids that are getting better, so that’s an unbelievable story. I’ve never had anything close to that, so we’ll see how he does this week. He’s a good player on the team.

Just to be light-hearted, Blake Blackmar just says whatever is on his mind. So we’re walking through on Friday getting ready for the game, and there was no school, so I let all the kids that weren’t traveling go home. So we let all the specialists be the defense. So Blackmar gets up there and says, “Put that new kicker in. I want to knock him down” or whatever, and Sedwick said “I’m right here.” Blake didn’t even know who he was. Last night, Blackmar said, “Now that he made those kicks, I’ve got to be nice to him.” So, credit to the kid. Credit goes to Jay. So now we’ll have him for four years.”

*On if he knew he could tackle…*“Not only did I not know he could tackle, he’s never done a tackling drill with us. So, his last tackle was probably sometime in high school, probably a year or two years ago. He stepped up and made a play.”

*On if Sedwick’s energy enthused the team…*“I think our team was pretty fired up about that. I think our team was excited to see him do those things. In times like this, you have to tell those guys not to pay attention to all of this, but to point out the bright spots of “Hey, look at what he’s doing.” I mean, look at Terence [Williams]. The whole Terence saga is a great example of what we believe in, right? We believe in pushing people forward. I think all those positive stories give the kids energy and hope and let them know that no matter who you are, you’re going to get an opportunity at some point. Everyone is going to get an opportunity at some point, so you better be ready for it, and Jay was ready for the opportunity, whether it was last Monday in the tryout, last Tuesday in the tryout, or Saturday versus Oklahoma State. He was ready.”