**Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule**

**Weekly Press Conference**

**October 24, 2017**

“Alright, well first, thank you everybody for being here. Just to reflect on last week’s game, as I said after the game, we can’t thank the people that hung around and watched that comeback enough. The last two home games, Oklahoma and West Virginia, we’re sorry and we’re sad that we weren’t able to finish those games, but the way the student section, band, family and friends stand and cheer for the guts and the fight of the team is an encouragement to our players. I think if there’s anything that tells me why this is such a great place, it would be that. I don’t know that I’ve ever seen that. Some of our coaches have been in the NFL, and we’ve just never seen it. That’s what makes Baylor such a special place. It makes us want to fight so much more and bring a victory to the fans and students and all the people that care so much about Baylor. So, for that I want to say thank you.

I thought our team competed really, really hard at the end of the game. I think the takeaway for us is not to give up three scores on three straight possessions, which really is just a matter of a lack of hope. I think we saw that at Oklahoma State and we saw it this past week. These kids are pushing so hard and fighting so hard that when things start to go down a bad path, we lose a little bit of hope. I think you saw the character of our team though, as we fought back. Now, the key is to put together a 60-minute ballgame, where we are not giving up explosive plays on defense and we’re a little more efficient on offense. I’m proud of the way our offense is not turning the ball over, but we have to run the football, especially down in the red zone. Those are the things that are holding us back from being the team we can be, and we’re working hard to correct those as we move forward.

Obviously, this is an exciting week for us as we get to play the University of Texas, coming up from Austin. They’re a great team. They’re extremely talented with great coaches, and we know the challenge that lies in front of us. I know our kids are excited. As I told them, I don’t know if there’s a more mentally tough team in the country, because they come back every Monday and they get on the line and they run their half-gassers and they work. They keep coming back each week, and, as a result, they’re getting better. While it doesn’t show on the record, a lot guys are getting a lot better. There are good stories everywhere, but we just have to put it all together. This will be one heck of a week to do that, because they have special players, and we have to play our best to have a chance.

I know you guys are going to ask me about the quarterback situation, but if we went out there today, I’d put Zach [Smith] out there first and have Charlie [Brewer] ready. I just think, in these times, Zach’s done too much. He led that comeback against Oklahoma, and I think it’s too quick to say ‘Charlie played great.’ Charlie needs to be ready to play, but I don’t want to have a quick trigger on our quarterback. I think Zach got into that ballgame not feeling real well and pressed a little too much, and he didn’t have much help. I thought as we got going in the second half and guys got more confidence as we got back in there, guys started making plays they didn’t make in the first half. I have the utmost confidence in Zach, just like I have confidence in Charlie, and just how I have confidence in Trestan Ebner and Terence Williams and all those other kids. We’re going to see if we can put it all together this week and move forward against a great Texas Longhorn team. So, with that, I’ll see what questions you guys have.”

*On if there’s a chance both quarterbacks could play…*“Well, we’ve tried to play both quarterbacks since the Kansas State game. There might have been smaller roles for Charlie [Brewer], but we know he’s a gamer. We had him ready to punt last week. We’ve done that the last four games, so I don’t know why this would be different. We’ll probably have a package for Charlie ready to go. And again, this is Monday. We were up all night working, and we’ll be working all day today, so we’ll see where that leads. I think the biggest thing is that this is such a hard defense to prepare for. You can’t be random with what you want to do. They’re so hard to attack schematically and talent-wise that we have to be really sharp in the way we decide to do it. We’ll see if we can put some things together if it’s Zach [Smith], and if it’s Charlie, we’ll put him in there and see what happens.”

*On the challenges of facing Texas…*“Well, again, they just have elite players. They have tremendous talent. Their receivers are as fast as any we’ve seen. They have two great quarterbacks. I know Sam [Ehlinger] is banged up a little bit right now, but Shane [Buechele] can really play, and [Jerrod] Heard can play. They’ve got great players and great skill across the board. And defensively, they have a tremendous defensive line. Their nose tackle, Poona Ford, is as good as we’ve seen. They have great players, and I think Todd Orlando on defense does a good job of taking away what you do well and attacking you in all areas. You have to be ready for the blitz. They’re number one in the conference right now on third down. They get off the field better than anybody. They have great players, a great scheme, and a toughness about them, so it’ll be a real challenge for our offense. It’ll come on third down and trying to run the football. Defensively for us, they get the ball on the perimeter, and those guys can go, so there are great players and a great scheme to go along with it.”

*On momentum from last game…*“I think the thing I’m excited about is the last two first quarters. We’ve come out and we’ve been ready to play, and we’ve been more ready than we had previously. It was 21-7 against Oklahoma or whatever it was, but in this last game, even though they were able to go down and get a field goal on the first drive, we were able to move the ball down the field. We just weren’t able to punch it in. It was 7-3, and I’m not great at remembering what everything was, but it was kind of a back and forth game in the first quarter. It’s just that in the second quarter and at the end of the half we got a little tired. We had a chance with the ball to go down and take the lead going into halftime, and that flipped on us quick. You’re hopeful that the players begin to recognize the mindset that was present in the fourth quarter. We just need to have that mindset the whole game. Bad things are going to happen. Good things are going to happen. We just need to go out there and expect good things and deal with bad things. That’s what I say to myself the whole game. That’s how you have to think to get through these games. As we continue to do that, as we’re doing that better now than we were, we can go out and play even better.”

*On if Texas’ defensive line is the best Baylor has faced all year…*“I’m anxious to see. You usually say those things after the game. You kind of have to see them. I go back to the highest drafted kid that we’re going to play against is [UTSA’s Marcus] Davenport. Every scout I’ve heard has said he’s a first or second rounder. The guys at Duke are really, really good, as well as Oklahoma and Kansas State. We’ve faced a lot of really good d-lines, but when you watch these guys, you see their defensive talent everywhere. They’ve got six-foot-one corners that can run. They’ve got real skill. They’ve recruited really well for a while, even since I played the University of Texas in 1996 as a player. They had great players then. They have done a great job, and they have a great scheme. I don’t want to minimize what Coach Orlando does. He does a great job of taking away what you do.”

*On if there was a higher expectation for tight ends in the passing game…*“Yeah, we’d like to. I know we took three or four shots at Ish [Wainright] in the game, even going back to the last play of the last game, where we threw a corner route to Ish and he wasn’t able to come down with it. Then, we took a shot in the red zone to him and took another shot in the red zone to him, so we’re trying to utilize his size and athleticism, but it hasn’t really clicked yet. When [Jordan] Feuerbacher was out with the hand and Ish was out, Rob Saulin played o-line all of fall camp, so we weren’t really going to try to get the ball to him. We’d like to though. We hit Feuerbacher for a little bit of a play against Oklahoma State once he got that cast off, but it hasn’t really clicked that way. When we’ve had to throw the ball, we’ve put four wides on the field, and that changes a little bit now with RJ [Sneed] being out. We have to figure out who that new person is going to be. We’re going to continue to bring Ish along, because he does have ball skills, but we just weren’t able to get the ball to him. We recognize that he could be a threat for us, but we haven’t been able to make that click.”

*On if Ish Wainright can make plays…*“Yes sir. Ish [Wainright] has a seven-foot wingspan and he can really go up and catch the ball. I think the big thing has been that it’s contact-oriented. He’s been running down the middle of the field and there’s a guy on him. Or he’s going up to catch a ball and he’s been getting hit. He hasn’t been able to bring those down yet like a rebound in traffic.”

*On what quarterback Baylor is going to prepare for…*“I think you just go in and prepare for UT’s offense. I don’t know if we’re in a position yet where we can focus on taking things away. We’re still just trying to eliminate the big passing plays. I think, for us, it’s just getting ready for their offense. Coach Beck and Coach Herman do a really good job. We faced Coach Herman once when I was at Temple and he was at Houston. We have to just try to do the best that we can to get our guys ready to play. This week, for us, is much more about us and much less about them and the things that they do. We’ve just got to continue to get our guys ready on defense. When we’re not turning guys loose for big plays, we’ve played decent defense at times. When we’re turning guys loose, that’s more a factor of us than anybody else.”

*On if he can point to Iowa State and show his players what the product of the process is…*“I don’t think I have to sell our kids too much. I think they see what’s happening. That’s one of the benefits of playing young guys. When you’re playing a bunch of old guys, juniors and seniors, they can lose hope quickly. All year, I’ve been talking about how impressed I am with our seniors, because they’re leading the charge. I think our young kids recognize it. Look at Connor Martin, because I get a lot of questions about him. Literally Connor Martin was about 50% of what he is now in preseason. I wouldn’t even kick him from outside the 20 in preseason because I wanted to keep his confidence up. I think they see that if you work really hard, you can get better. [Trestan] Ebner hadn’t really taken a handoff since whenever, because he was a great tail back in high school but then a receiver, and now they see him making plays. I do think, when you see what Coach Campbell has done, and I know that family of guys from Mt. Union, they bring a toughness, and there’s not a better coached defense in the league than Iowa State. I don’t mean to digress from Iowa State, but they have a really well-coached defense from what we’ve seen the last couple weeks. They have a toughness to them. It is proof that you can be spread out and still be tough and physical. And they’re doing it as well as anyone.”

*On if Lovett is available after not being listed on the depth chart…*“Yeah, he’ll be available. It’s just that [football communications director] Taylor [Bryan] brings me those things and Terence [Williams] has been our workhorse, downhill guy, even though we weren’t really able to get him going last week due to the nature of the game. And I thought [Trestan] Ebner played really well, so we’ll have all those guys ready. We tried to use three backs last week to take advantage of the 3-3, and we had that inverted bone going, which isn’t really something we’ve done a lot, and I’m not sure we’re going to do it again. We just thought it’d fit against West Virginia. We’ll try to get them all going, including JaMycal [Hasty]. They’re all base parts of what we’re doing.”

*On what Trestan Ebner adds to the running back corps. and his switch from receiver…*“I think the decision by Trestan [Ebner] to go ahead and move shows the loyalty that he has and the person that he is. He’s as hard-working and tough and industrious as a kid as there is. So, I think the biggest thing for him is that we knew he had great speed and great hands, but he’s gotten more comfortable. You can even take apart the plays at the end of the game. He cut a couple angle routes early and was getting through contact and spinning off, and a little of that showed up against Oklahoma State. One big play got called back for a hold. We’ve been working with him on remembering this isn’t high school, and you can’t just take the ball and run to the sideline and outrun everyone every time. To see him be physical and have contact was really good. He’s been one of our third down backs because he can get in there and block. I think it is a credit to [co-OC/running backs coach] Jeff [Nixon] by taking a receiver and teaching him how to play running back, but really it is a credit to Trestan. He’s just a football player. He’s been willing to do whatever we’ve needed him to do. He runs down on kick-offs and he runs down on punts. All the jobs we ask him to do, he does.”

*On being proud of how quickly the freshmen are growing up…*

“Absolutely. And even Gavin Holmes, we probably should have played him a little bit more sooner. I think the bye week was really good for us. Gavin got out there and went from inside receiver to outside receiver which, for a freshman, is really hard, and he just went out there and did it. He’s a gamer. He’s a football guy. Sometimes we would say, ‘hey let’s get the ball to [Denzel] Mims.’ Now it’s not. We had [Chris] Platt and it’s hard now. Losing Chris Platt was a really big thing for us because they couldn’t just take the whole field. Now everyone is taking the whole field and rolling to Mims. It’s hard to get him the ball, but with Gavin opening it up now hopefully we can make people play us straight up. I thought that was really impressive by him to go out there and not blink. He just practices hard. He plays hard. The things I’m asking him to do don’t seem foreign to him, and that makes it easy to coach him.”

*On parallels between Baylor and Texas football this season…*

“I don’t know if I would compare what we’re going through with anyone. I think what we’re doing is unique. What I will say is when you have games that you go through, and then you get down to the wire and you lose, you have one of two things. Either it empowers you and emboldens you and you get angry and come back and play great the next week, or you are frustrated and start to lose hope. Our kids haven’t really lost heart at all. They haven’t really lost hope, so I’m proud of them. I just think the things that we’re going through, other people probably went through similar things, but this is really a unique situation. I said it after the game. I thanked these kids because not many kids could do what our players are doing. Not many kids could go through what our players are doing, and they’re doing it in a classy way. They’re doing it with the all the heart that they have, so I’m proud of them. As I told them, I don’t know that there’s a more mentally tough team in the country. I said it earlier because we keep coming back. Now we have to go be mentally tough on Saturday. I was walking over here and he told me it was going to be like 40 degrees on Saturday. I’m so fired up, so excited.”

On Trestan Ebner being highly recruited…

“Yes sir, Trestan Ebner was pretty highly recruited coming out of Henderson High School. His tailback in high school La'Kendrick Van Zandt, La’Kendrick went to TCU, and Trestan was committed elsewhere when we got here. He’s one of those kids that wanted to come to Baylor, but hadn’t been recruited by Baylor. Then when we got here, we offered him. His sister Tiana and his mom, they were on board.”

*On how he recruited Charlie Brewer…*

“Well I don’t know what was going on with all of the other schools, but in the end, one of the great things about Charlie Brewer and a couple of the other kids like RJ Sneed is I didn’t meet them. They committed and came here and signed up for school, and I never met them until they moved into their dorm. I didn’t go to Charlie Brewer’s house. I didn’t meet his family. I talked to him on the phone which nowadays kids don’t really want to talk on the phone. They just want to text. I had to talk to him on the phone, talk to him on the phone. I think Shawn Bell was great in that recruiting process. The day he moved into the dorm on the first day of school, Charlie came over here with his family and introduced himself to me. You can’t make this stuff up. This has never happened before, and it’s awesome. It stinks sometimes when you’re going through it. I met RJ’s mom, Dr. Sneed, I met her for the first time when he came to school. These are unique, unique situations that just tells us that there’s a purpose to all of it, and it’s working out. It’s fun to see Charlie out there playing. It’s fun to see Gavin [Holmes] and Trestan [Ebner]. It’s fun to see some of our older kids playing. DJ Artis, BJ Thompson, they’re all out there running around. A lot of our sophomores and juniors, the thing that they’re doing is, I mentioned Connor [Martin], they’re getting better. Pooh Stricklin, I didn’t think Pooh was going to play, and Pooh said, ‘I’m going.’ To see him get out there was good.”

*On if he thinks recruiting can get even better this year…*

“Yeah, the difference with our recruiting now is that we actually know the people, and we have relationships with them. That being said, I think there’s a bunch of future pros this first class. One of the benefits is, recruiting now has become we offer kids when they’re in like the ninth grade. You don’t anymore see what a player looks like his senior year. What we decided was we’re not going to change that approach. If we know a kid is good enough, we’re going to offer him, we’re going to commit him. We had a ton of recruits here on Saturday, and to the fans I thank you because they left saying, ‘that’s where I want to go to school,’ after seeing the support. But we also want to go watch guys in their senior year to see if we can find anymore gems like these guys because you know what, some kids develop late. That’s really what I think we had a lot of success at Temple with, and I know they had success here before with guys that weren’t really super highly recruited and all of a sudden show up, and they’re great, great players. We’re going to continue to try to do that. I’m really happy with our recruiting, and I think it will be really good this year.”

*On the difficulty of losing Platt and Sneed…*

“Well my heart aches for RJ [Sneed]. There’s not a better kid or a better family, and when you break your leg, that’s a painful one. That’s a surgical answer. RJ is built from the right cloth and he will come back. To us, what does it do to us? Maybe we have to use more tight ends, maybe we have to use more running backs. The whole year has been like an NFL roster. Every week it’s, ‘who’s active this week?’ Then we’ve tried to play those guys. I think when you had Chris [Platt] and Denzel [Mims] out there it just sort of spread the field, and Tony [Nicholson] was much more open. I think Tony’s doing a good job of getting open right now. I think he’s a bright spot. We’ll just have to continue to try to find guys. If Ish [Wainright] has to play more, if [Jordan] Feuerbacher plays more, if we move a running back, we’re just kind of having to figure all of that out based upon not just whose even healthy. But is Pooh [Stricklin] healthy this week? Is [John] Lovett healthy this week? There’s all those guys that are banged up. You know Pooh didn’t practice yesterday. We’re hoping he can practice at some point this week. It is what it is, and we’ll just keep pushing through it.”

*On potentially switching Trestan Ebner back to receiver…*

“You know he could. I just hate to switch him again. An older guy could probably do that, but he was never foundationally in our receivers. The minute he got here, we went through the summer and recognized that Terence [Williams] was out, and we had JaMycal [Hasty] and [John] Lovett and that was it. We said, ‘hey we need you to move to running back’. Earlier in the year we were playing with Dru Dixon, a freshman that I thought had some good runs against Duke, and then he got hurt. If this was maybe next year, I’d move Trestan, but I don’t know that Trestan could move right now.

*On how he got John Lovett to Baylor…*

“I begged him. I begged [John] Lovett to come here. John Lovett was a kid that I had in camp at Temple. He’s from south New Jersey. When he was a sophomore, we knew right then that was good. We just weren’t going to get him at Temple. He had too many offers. He was too big. He was probably going to play in the Big 10 or the SEC, but we had a relationship with him. Francis Brown does a great job, and his record of the kids he recruited in south Jersey, they know like, ‘hey if you go play for Francis, he’s going to take care of you. He’s going to push you. He’s one of the hardest guys to play for, but he’s going to take care of you.’ We’ve had three freshmen, we took three kids from that part of the country. We took three freshmen from New Jersey, and all three have started for us. Lovett, Harrison Hand, and Rob Saulin. We just kind of knew those guys. We knew we couldn’t get them at Temple, but we hoped we could get them here. I went up there, and I begged Lovett to come. I said, ‘come down here, and I think you can be a great back for us.’ I think the biggest thing is the reason why I feel so good about John Lovett, just like a lot of our other kids is he runs for a touchdown, and the he runs down on the next opening kickoff and tries to make the tackle. When you’ve got guys like that, you can be a really good team.”

*On how he convinced the Brewer family to trust him without meeting them…*

“You’d have to ask them I guess. I just tried to be open and honest. I think there was a part of Charlie [Brewer] that wanted to play in the Big 12. He comes from a great family. We just talked to him and were honest. I think he recognized at the time, that there was one scholarship quarterback, so it’s a pretty good opportunity in terms of depth. That’s probably more a story that they would know. At that time, a lot of that is a blur. You know Tre’von Lewis, Tre’von committed to us sight unseen. There was a lot of kids that just kind of leapt based upon faith, and we appreciate that.”

*On the chance of Blake Lynch playing some on offense…*

“I don’t know I think we’re kind of banged up in the secondary. We would love it if Blake [Lynch] could play on the offensive side. He’s been a little bit banged up, and he’s played so much on defense, I’m just not sure that would happen. We would like it to, but I just don’t know that he can handle it physically.”

*On defensive depth and fatigue issues…*

“Well it’s giving up big plays. You can point to this, that, this, that, but at the end of the day even on that last drive before the half, they ran the ball a couple times. I don’t want to say it’s just this one thing. First play of the second half, it’s just a missed tackle. It should be a tackle for an eight-yard gain that’s missed. So be it. Move on. Keep playing. They dropped a great fade in the second drive, and we’re just inches away from getting it. I would not want to take anything away from West Virginia. I thought they executed really well in those situations, and we just kind of didn’t. I think in the fourth quarter we were getting better. We need to do it now.”

*On Shawn Bell’s hand in recruiting Brewer…*

“When we first got here, [offensive analyst] Shawn [Bell] was on the road for us. David Wetzel was on the road for us. Eventually Joey [McGuire] got on the road for us, and then the guys that had come with me. Talk about guys that know Baylor. Shawn Bell and David Wetzel are able to go out, and they know Baylor, so they were able to go out and talk to people. Then I think with Joey McGuire, a lot of people at the time were saying, ‘can I send my son to Baylor?’ Then Joey McGuire, people know his name, and people know that he’s not going to take his career somewhere that’s not a good place. When his son decided that he was going to come here, because Joey’s son is a quarterback on our team. When he and Debbie decided that they were going to send Garret here, I think that spoke volumes to a lot of people that, ‘hey this is a good place. We’re leaving a great thing at Cedar Hill, and we’re coming to Baylor, and our son’s coming to Baylor.’ It’s one thing when you say, ‘hey this is a great place.’ It’s another thing when your actions back that up. I think the value of those three guys, I can never put it into words what they did for us recruiting wise.”

*Parting thought…*

“If I could just say one thing. We had Coach Teaff come in and talk to the team before the season, and I know that they’re going to honor him for the silver anniversary of his last game in 1992, 21-20 over Texas. It’s just always an honor to be on the field with Coach Teaff and that team, so I want to make sure I say that and thank them, and thank everyone that is going to come out to the game. Bring your hot chocolate, it’ll hopefully be cool.”