**Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule**

**Weekly Press Conference**

**November 7, 2017**

**Opening Statement**

 “Well, first of all, thank you everybody for being here. It’s nice to be able to have a chance to get up here and talk to you guys about a win. I’m really proud of our team. I’m proud of our players and coaches. It was a team effort. A lot of guys contributed. A lot of guys stepped up. That’s what we needed. I’m hopeful that we can continue that as we move forward, and hopefully we can be a better team, as we get ready for a tremendous Texas Tech team this Saturday.

A couple guys stood out that aren’t really getting a ton of attention because they didn’t score touchdowns. I thought our defensive line was fantastic on Saturday. Other than that one long run, they allowed us to stop the run for most of the game. There are just a lot of guys on that group that are rotating in and playing. I’m proud of Ira [Lewis] and Brayvion [Roy] and Greg Roberts and Jamie Jacobs and all those guys—the young guys. Will Jones played his first football and got out there and did a nice job. I thought a lot of guys on the defensive line made a real impact.

Two guys really stood out to me. One was Taylor Young, and I know he didn’t really get any recognition or any awards, but when you watch the film, the film outdid the statistics in terms of how well Taylor played. For him to go from playing ‘will’ to playing ‘mike’ is a major transition and he still had the production that he had. It was one of his finest moments that I’ve seen. The other guy is Jordan Williams. I thought he was huge in the game. [Eric] Ogor went down and [Jalen] Pitre had to go from ‘will’ over to ‘sam’, so Jordan had to come into the game. We’ve always believed in Jordan, but this was his opportunity, and he flew around, hit people, knocked the ball out and was physical. I thought Jordan Williams was the difference for us on defense, with his ability to come in and play.

Finally, I’d be remiss if I didn’t talk about Blake Lynch, and his ability to go in and learn two positions at receiver on offense and have production there, and then also play on defense and special teams. For him to play on all three sides of the ball is something that not a lot of guys can do physically, much less mentally. I think it shows what Blake Lynch is capable of and what he can do. I thought he was really, really special.

A lot of other guys contributed in that game. I thought it was great that we were able to run the ball on 4th-and-1 and convert some third downs. Terence [Williams] did a great job getting out of the backfield and converting some third downs. It was a good team win, and now we have to move on and say what’s next as we prepare for Texas Tech and Coach Kingsbury and their offense and their defense. They’re extremely good at what they do so it’ll be a heck of a challenge, but I think our guys are excited to get back to work and continue the process of getting ready to play this week. So, with that, I’ll see what questions you guys have.”

**On the quarterback situation…**

“I haven’t really seen if Zach [Smith] can throw yet, so we’ll go out there this afternoon and see. I asked him last night, and he said he was still getting better, but limited. So, I’m sure we’ll go out there today with Charlie [Brewer], and then see what Zach’s able to do. If Zach’s able to do more, maybe we’ll change our thoughts, but if we were to go out and play today, Charlie would be the quarterback.”

**On if he has a propensity for going for it on 4th and 1…**

“Well, I think it kind of depends on how well we’re doing on defense, and how well we’re doing offensively. There was twice where the kids wanted me to go for it on fourth down early in that game and we punted the ball. And let me just say, Connor Martin, too, was really special in that game. He got two balls inside the five. So, when there was a time I thought we were playing good defense, I might try to pin them and put their back to the wall. I think I have a lot of confidence in where we’re heading and the way we’re playing, so sometimes on 3rd-and-10 I’ll say, “Hey, you’ve got two downs, so throw the ball underneath and try to get five yards, and we’ll go for it on 4th.”

So, it’s just kind of a feel for how we’re playing defense and what our chances are of stopping them. So, on that 4th-and-1, I was going to kick the field goal, and I had [Phil] Snow in my ear and the offensive staff in my ear telling me to go for it. The defensive players were telling me to go for it too. I don’t think I could’ve told Taylor [Young] and Taion [Sells], “Hey we’re going to kick it here,” so it was good for us. I think the thing we had to do was make some plays when we had the lead to put our foot down. We needed to step on them and close it out. So, we went for it on 4th-and-1 with a chance to close the game, and we found a way to get it done. But, yeah we have to find a way to be aggressive. We’ve called a couple punt fakes that haven’t necessarily always been there, so we’ve gotten out of it. We realize where we are right now. We have to steal a possession or go for it on fourth down to try to find a way to win.”

**On how much fun it was after the win…**

“It was a ton of fun. Those guys have worked so hard and we’ve had to put things in perspective so many times in the locker room. We still had to put things in perspective after the game, because great teams ask what’s next and move forward. But it was good for them to have a chance to celebrate and be happy. I just liked the way they finished the game. I didn’t want a team that, when we finally got up and had a chance to win, would celebrate too early or be careless or sloppy or make the other team look bad or not be respectful. I just like the way our guys handled it at the end of the game. We found a way to keep them out of the end zone. We got our fourth quarter shutout. We ran for 65 yards in the fourth quarter. We got the touchdown to Ish [Wainright]. We won the game, shook their hands, said a prayer, went and saw our fans, and went to the locker room. The nice thing was that the way we handled things when we lost was the same way we handled things when we won. But to get in the locker room and see the happy looks on their faces, and to go in on Monday morning and have the team meeting and call out award winners, which we only do when we win, was really nice. Offensive scout team player of the week was Obim Okeke, and defense scout team player of the week was James Lockhart, and they might not get a ton of time to play right now, with Lockhart sitting out, but all those guys understand it was a team win. It was all the guys on the scout team. It was all the guys that signaled during the game. It was everyone. That was fun.”

**On the plan going forward with Blake Lynch…**

“We’ll probably have to continue to play him on offense some. I think really at the end of the day, Blake’s probably going to leave here as one of the great safeties to have played here. He’s just got unique defensive skills. We need him on offense right now, and we kind of need him on defense. Guys are banged up on defense as well. Tony [Nicholson] went out there yesterday and tried to run around a little bit, so I think having Tony could help us figure out how much. What he can do, I don’t know. I think Blake is up to the challenge, it’s just about getting in the game. Mentally he can handle all of it. It’s just about getting into the game and how much load we put on him. He’s just a unique, unique athlete, so we have to try to take advantage of him on both sides of the ball.

**On the challenges that Texas Tech presents….**

Well offensively, they’re dynamic. They go fast, so they challenge you with tempo. They challenge with you know, they spread the field. They do everything. Coach does a great job. They find a way to run the football. I mean they run the ball. Oklahoma comes out, and they’re running the football up and down the field. They’ve got great players. I don’t want to say his name wrong but Keke Coutee has really kind of torn up everybody that he’s played against. He’s a deep-play threat. It’s going to be a challenge for us defensively. We try to be multiple. We try to play four down, three down. We try to blitz. We try to do all that, but these guys will challenge you. They have an answer for everything, and they do a great job. The quarterback is playing really, really well. They’re as good of an offensive line as we’ve seen. They’re starting a true freshman on the line, Jack Anderson. They’re really, really good at what they do. Then defensively, you know it’s another 3-4 team, and we haven’t had a ton of success against the 3-4 teams. Typically, when we’re a 4-3 team, our offense will sometimes have to really work hard to be good against something that they don’t see every day. That’s the challenge for us this week is to try to get some run-game production versus a 3-4 defense. I think it’ll be a real challenge for both sides of the ball. Obviously, one of the things coming out of last game was our special teams, our kickoff team was not very good at all. Every ball came back out to the 50. You can’t play this offense and give them the ball at the 50, so we’ve got to be better on special teams and just try to find a way to slow them down at some point.

**On having Connor Martin handle some kickoffs…**

“Well it’s just getting the hang time right. We were kind of hitting the ball, and hang time was about 3.2-3.3. When you kick a ball at 3.2-3.3, the ball is going to come back out to the 50 no matter what you do. Connor [Martin] gave us a couple where he got it to 3.9, but we’d like it to be in the fours. That was kind of that thought process. But Jay [Sedwick] kicked well again yesterday, so it’s just about getting him back into a rhythm.”

**On any other injuries…**

“I’m not good of thinking of things off the top of my head. I mean Pooh’s [Stricklin] still out. Clay’s [Johnston] still out. [John] Lovett’s back. He practiced yesterday. He’s good. He was just sick, so he’s healthy. KJ’s [Smith] running. I don’t know if it’ll be this week. I think if KJ has a chance to play, if he’s healthy enough, I think it’ll be the last two games that will be his opportunities.”

**On Jordan Williams’ light coming on…**

“Well it might have come on, but he hadn’t necessarily had the opportunity to play that many snaps in a row just kind of being behind Taylor [Young]. I think he went out there, and he really played at a level that we were excited about. Again, it’s just about every week finding a couple of guys that go out and play at that level and say, ‘he can do it. He can do it. He can do it.’ I thought that was a lot of guys on the d-line, but certainly Jordan. With Jordan Williams we left that game saying, ‘okay we’ve got a guy that can run around and make plays.’

**On what Jordan Williams brings to the table…**

“Well Jordan [Williams] has a swagger, and he has a confidence. We’ve challenged him to become more physical, and I thought he played really, really physically in that game. I think the thing that he did was, when you face those offenses that are so multiple, there’s so many times you have to get everyone on the same page. I thought Jordan was so calming out there. He’s got everyone on the same page. The defensive line knew what was happening. Between him and Taylor [Young], they were really able to captain the ship there, and make sure we all were playing the same, making sure we all had the right adjustments.

**On playing at AT&T Stadium…**

When I was with the Giants, we went and played the Cowboys. I went up in the coaches’ box, and they gave me like Kobe beef sliders and sashimi. In the first quarter, I kind of found myself, like it was almost surreal. I’m watching the big screen, and I’m eating instead of being locked in to doing my job. Coach Coughlin and the staff quickly corrected me on doing my job. I had a chance to go this year and see the Cowboys and the Colts play in the preseason. My wife and a couple of our coaches went up. A couple of our kids from Temple were playing in that game, and some people here were kind enough to let us come watch the game with them, Mr. and Mrs. Turner. It’s a beautiful place. It’s a great place. You know it makes less decisions for me. Kick with the wind. Don’t kick with the wind. It’s a lot easier as the head coach just to go out there and play.

**On Kyle Boyd playing on Veteran’s Day…**

“I don’t think there’s enough you can say about Kyle [Boyd]. Number one, it’s the sacrifice that he made and the things that he’s been through. Number two, it’s the fact that you would never know all the things he’s been through because he just handles his business. He’s just such a complete and total “team guy”. He has tremendous work ethic. Whatever role you give Kyle Boyd he just embraces it and does it to the best of his ability. He’s not lout about it. His actions speak for him. He’s a blessing to have on this team, and he’s a really good football player. It puts both of them together. I think sometimes when you have these transitions, the older kids kind of wonder ‘do the new coaches really like me?’ so having guys like Kyle that you have so much respect for, I think it helps kind of bridge that gap. Transitions are hard, but Kyle has been through nothing but transitions in his life. He just comes to work and just works right through it and he fights right through it. I have a lot of respect for him, what he did in the military and as a veteran, but also what he does day in and day out. You can certainly see his character come through in everything that he does.”

**On Taylor Young moving to the middle…**

“It would be like if we went to Britain right now and you had to drive on the left side of the car, you know, you’re still driving, you’ve been driving your whole life, but everything is flipped. It’s one thing to do it on an open race track, it’s another thing to do it when cars are coming at you. It’s one thing for Taylor [Young] to do it in practice and think ‘Oh okay now wait a minute now I have the A-gap and I have to do this.” It’s another thing to do it when they’re going into a huddle and they’re coming at you. Watching Taylor was like ‘Wow that’s who he is,” he is a mike linebacker, that’s where he fit. I think he told me it took him a series or two to get his bearings, where he was really comfortable, but after that he really played well. Just some instinctive things that he does that you can’t really coach. I thought it was really special during the week leading up to it and then to be able to go out in the game and play at that level. Not just in terms of the production, 10 tackles, tackle for loss, a sack, not just that but the way he played, what it looked like on film.

**On Gavin Holmes’ improvement…**

I look back and I regret not playing him more, early on. To hand him a speed sweep on the 4-yard line means we have real confidence in his instincts. When you call a play like that you’re saying, ‘Hey I’m giving you the ball, go score.’ When sometimes with the passing game, you call the play and the defense dictates who gets the ball. I think Gavin [Holmes] is competitive, and he’s tough. I’m coaching him like a veteran. Like there was a play the first drive where we threw a skinny post that I thought was going to be a touchdown, it was a little behind him, and he didn’t get his head around it. I didn’t treat him and Charlie [Brewer] like freshmen. I went over there, and I told him ‘Let’s go, get your head around.’ Gavin is just tough, tough, tough player. He works hard. He’s not afraid to get hit. I mean he tried to catch another one late in the game, and got hit but caught another one after that. I think his emergence has allowed [Denzel] Mims to have more production now. Because you can’t just say ‘Hey, let’s take away Denzel.” Gavin is probably one of the faster guys on the team.

“Having Blake [Lynch] and Tony [Nicholson] inside. JaMycal [Hasty] did a great job last week going from running back to slot receiver and then going back to play running back when [Trestan] Ebner got hurt. There’s a lot of guys that are opening things up.

**On Cowboys’ players’ comments on the sun coming into AT&T Stadium…**

That’s the first I’ve heard of that. I’ll have to look at that. I try to consider everything. I try to look at everything. But I’m a Giants fan, so I wasn’t listening. I’m just teasing. I’d have to look into that. I don’t know about that.

**On if the team has special fourth down plays…**

No, I mean we have a couple like down inside the red zone, we have a couple plays that have multiple options, like two-point plays almost. I think you just go to your best. A lot of it is kind of what they’re doing. I think the final part of it is just your players understanding. We try to be very disciplined about not reaching the ball across the goal line, not reaching the ball out, but understanding that on fourth down, every ball has to get past the sticks. I think it’s just a mindset kind of like Coach Belichick understanding the situations, understanding how to excel in those situations and not have any pressure when you do it. I think one of the things it does do is sometimes it brings down our third down because a lot of times I’m saying, ‘hey it’s 3rd-and-8. Treat it like it’s 3rd-and-4. Get four yards then we’re going to go for it on fourth.’ Sometimes that can be frustrating to the play caller or frustrating to the quarterback, but I think our quarterbacks, both quarterbacks have done a good job of understanding that when it’s 3rd-and-10, if we call a play and the back’s there, get it to the back and let the back go make a play.

There was a play to [Trestan] Ebner that he ran down to the 3- yard line. That was just it’s 3rd-and-long. We’re going to dump him the ball and see what he can do, and they happened to blitz, and he was able to get out. We’re just trying to be very situationally oriented. There was some wind there the other day, and it was cold. How much we wanted to kick and how far we wanted to kick were I think factors in that game as well.

**On the offensive line he expects to have next year…**

I think we’ll have a really good offensive line next year, and here’s why I say that. For a lot of the game, there’s five guys out there that will be back next year. I think that they’re going to continue to get bigger, and stronger, and better, and more experienced. You look at [Sam Tecklenburg] and [Josh] Malin, they were catching balls in the spring. I think Sam and Josh have done a great job of improving as the year has gone on. We travel on the road and we bring Eleasah Anderson and Henry Klinge who are both redshirting, but I wouldn’t play them at this point in the year. Then we have a couple other guys. Then we have Khalil Keith who’s sitting out. We have a bunch of guys just kind of sitting there, so I think our offensive line will continue to improve and improve and improve and improve.

**On offensive line recruiting…**

Yeah, we have three or four kids committed to us right now on the offensive line. I really believe you win with offensive linemen and defensive linemen. All of our defensive linemen except Brian [Nance] and K.J. [Smith], they all come back, so they’re playing a bunch of young guys. They’ll get better. Our offensive line will get better, and I think they’ve gotten better as the year has gone on. Like Mo Porter is a guy that has really been banged up, and I thought Mo played a really good game this past week to allow us to play well. We’ve done a pretty good job I think of recruiting some offensive and defensive linemen that can be difference makers as we head into next year.