**Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule**

**Weekly Press Conference**

**November 14, 2017**

***Opening Statement***

“First of all, thank you to everyone for being here today. We appreciate it. We’re obviously excited to come back and play at home in front of our fans against a tremendous Iowa State team. Really, it’s a tremendous opportunity for us to play against a team that’s done what we would like to do in terms of building off of last season and becoming a ranked team. What I will say is that it’s a great opportunity for us to honor our seniors in their last time playing at McLane. This entire week, I know our guys are giving everything they have to make sure this great group of young men goes out the right way.

Before I continue with football, I’d be remiss if I didn’t wish Coach Jobson and the soccer team the greatest of success. They’re a great team. They’re fun to watch and fun to be around. They’re fun to see in the nutrition center and in the weight room. They work hard day in and day out. To see them have the success that they’re having is awesome. Coach does a fantastic job. For those of you that saw Coach Mulkey’s post yesterday on social media, our thoughts and prayers go out to Kenzie and Clay as they deal with what they’re dealing with right now. Coach Mulkey is a fighter, I know that, and her family is all fighters, and our prayers are with them as they go through this time.

Back to football, obviously we were disappointed on Saturday. If you watch the film, there was so much beautiful football being played so much of the time, and to have a couple plays where we just beat ourselves was disappointing. We’ll continue to correct it, but what I wanted our players to take away was that we’ve gotten so much better, so now it’s time to put it all together, and there’s no better team to do it against than a team like Iowa State that’s tough, rugged, well-coached, and doesn’t beat themselves. Every one of their guys plays football the way it’s supposed to be played. So as our guys get better and better and better, this will be a true measuring stick to see how tough we are. When it’s not gimmicky and it’s just man-on-man, we’ll see how we respond. It’ll be a challenge, but I know it’s one our guys are looking forward to. We have tremendous respect for them, and we’re hopeful to see if we can take another step this week, at home, especially as we honor our seniors. So, with that, I’ll see what questions you guys have.”

***On what the seniors have meant to this team…***

“Number one, I think our seniors are just wonderful people. That’s first and foremost. There are a bunch of wonderful young men in this program. I think it starts with that senior class. I think the thing I can say is that so many of them had already graduated, and they could’ve gone somewhere else. They could’ve restarted their careers, but they chose to finish them here. While you could say it hasn’t gone the way they wanted it to go, they are a part of rebuilding the program. I think it’s important to say that they didn’t create the situation. All they’re doing is fixing it. And for that, I’m grateful. I’ll be eternally grateful for the seniors that walk out there on Senior Day, some of who came here as walk-ons, and some of who came here as scholarship players. To the team, I talk about Taylor [Young] a lot, because I played linebacker and that’s the position that I see. At the end of the day, even though the record hasn’t gone the way we wanted, he’s playing the best football of his career.

What Taion [Sells] and Taylor Young and Chance [Waz] and Brian Nance are building defensively right now might not seem like it’s showing up, but I’ll say this: In 2014, against Texas Tech, we gave up 707 yards. We gave up 600 yards in 2015. Last year, we gave up 666 yards. But we went out on Saturday and gave up 337 yards to Texas Tech. That’s their second lowest total of the year. I think we gave up 337 and Iowa State gave up 336. They cut the yardage in half from the year before. It’s not where it needs to be and it’s not where we want it to be, but that’s only happening because Taylor Young has practiced every single day this year. Brian Nance has practiced every single day this year. They haven’t stayed out when they’re banged up. They’re just tough and rugged. And you go over to offense and see that Mo Porter has played the whole year banged up. [Jordan} Feuerbacher breaks his hand and comes back. Ish Wainwright transitions from basketball and gets sick, but comes back. These are special stories, and just to go out and say that we’re thankful for our seniors isn’t enough. We have to say why. They could’ve left and they didn’t. They’re helping us build something. We couldn’t stop anybody in the first couple games, but to go out and hold them to 337 yards or whatever it was is progress, and progress is only happening because of the buy-in of our seniors. So, we’re hopeful that our team goes out there and puts it all together for them on Saturday.”

***On Taylor Young’s leadership…***

“Well, I think Taylor Young is a quiet leader. He doesn’t get up and give speeches before the team, though he’s grown in that role. I think the biggest thing he does is lead by example. He works hard and practices hard. He backs up everything he says. We say, “Hey, we need you to move to Mike,” and he learns it and he does it. We’re in that game the other day, and the quarterback would look to the sideline and Coach Kingsbury would give him a new play, and then Coach Snow would change the defense. We tried to do that all year, and all year, half the guys would get it and half the guys wouldn’t. As Taylor has taken over, he’s gotten everyone on the same page, and we’ve been able to play how we want to play. He backs everything up by leading by example. He’s a quiet but strong voice in the locker room. He talks to guys that are disenfranchised. He talks to guys that aren’t doing what they’re supposed to do, and he tells them what we need them to do. He’s even a guy that I meet with and look to for advice because I trust him. He’s someone that I think could be a coach someday. I told him that, whenever he’s done, if he’s thinking about getting into coaching, he needs to let me know, because he just has a gift of affecting other people, and that’s hard to find.

***On Taylor Young choosing to stay…***

“Not even was he just considering it, but he was gone. He wouldn’t even come over and talk to us. We said to him ‘Hey, we’re not going to beg you to come, but we want you to see what we think we could do for you and how playing in this defense could help you’. I think he mom and dad were a strong part of that; they wanted him here. There were strong, strong forces pulling against him, telling him not to be here and to go somewhere else. At the end of the day, he just got around Coach Siravo and Coach Snow, and he listened to them talk about what they believed. All I said to him was, you know, try it for a semester. Come back in the spring and if you don’t like it then you can always transfer somewhere else. He made that decision. It’s one that I’m grateful for. I’ve always told the guys, there will be a special place in this building for the guys that chose to stay. It’s Taion [Sells], Tyler Jaynes, all those guys, they made the decision to stay here, and if they hadn’t done that then we would’ve really been in peril in terms of the scholarships and everything. They’re the ones who stood in the gap and allowed us to continue to rebuild. The impact of this senior class, will never quite be understood. Unless you’re sitting there with my spreadsheets and looking at the roster, it will never be understood that if these guys wouldn’t have done what they did then it would’ve imploded, to be quite honest, from a scholarship perspective. It didn’t. So now we’re able to rebuild. I think Taylor, he didn’t stay for any of those reasons. He wanted to play really good football. I promised him, if you play for Coach Snow and Coach Siravo, when you watch the tape at the end of the year you’ll be one of the best linebackers in the Big 12. He is one of the best defensive players in the Big 12. We might rotate a little bit, and he might not have doughty numbers. You put the tape on, and there’s no doubt. That’s a credit to him and the fact that he’s just been tireless and selfless throughout this whole process.

***On Taylor Young at the next level…***

I think the biggest thing for him at the next level is someone has to say, ‘let me overlook his size and look at this play’. I think the versatility that he’s showing is going to help him. The fact that he runs down on special teams, the fact that he can play well and can play mike. When people ask me about him, when people ask me about all our seniors, I say this about all our seniors, they don’t ask me ‘hey is he a good player?’ that’s their job to find out if he is. They like football. They learn football. The money won’t change them. They know how to practice, and they know how to prepare. They’re going to be great in the locker room, and they’re going to be great in the meeting room. So, when you can play a couple positions, when you’re a guy that has the right football character and personal character that they’re looking for, then you hope you have a chance to play for a long time. I’m hopeful that Taylor and some of our other seniors have a chance to play pro football. Even after they’re done with that, they’re going to be successful. They’ve stood in the face of adversity, and not just handled it, but battled back and fought back and that’s hard to do.

***On Gavin’s injury…***

Gavin [Holmes]’s got an ACL [tear] so he’s going to have surgery here in a couple weeks. He’s got to build some strength up first. Tough blow for him, but he’s a tough, tough young man. He’ll rehab, and he’ll come back better though. I think for him it’ll be next year. I’ve always been very slow with guys coming back from ACLs. If he’s ready before next year, great. If he’s ready in the middle of next year, great. But if not, then he’ll be ready next spring and redshirt next year. We’ve had probably more ACLs than I’ve been around, all in games, not practice ACLs. Chris [Platt] and Drew [Galitz] coming back from their ACLs are making great progress, but they’ve had a little bit more time to come back. With Gavin, we’ll let the medical staff handle it, we’ve got good people here and they’ll handle it.

***On using Iowa State as an example for rebuilding…***

I don’t sit there and say, ‘hey look it could work’ but I do say ‘this is what it take to work’. We should them they could beat TCU, we should them Coach [Matt] Campbell talking to the team. All he talked about was ‘this is what happens when you believe in process.’ When you don’t get caught up in all sorts of stuff, but you’re out there on a Thursday and a Friday night in the spring lifting on your own and working extra. He literally talked about it, he said ‘this is what happens when you believe in process, and you shut out all the noise.’ So, we showed them that. It was after a tough loss for us. All we’re trying to get our guys to do is continue to buy into the things we can control, which is how we prepare, how hard we play, our process. They’ve done that there. They have a young man on their team who played for us at Temple. So, I know the kind of guys that they have; they’re tough. Matt [Eaton], who played for them, he’s tough. I didn’t want him to leave, I loved coaching him. They’ve got tough guys. They’ve got guys who compete. They have guys who play together and play football the right way. They never beat themselves, you know, I think they’re they only team in college football right now that hasn’t lost a fumble the entire year. They’re playing the right way. It’s just that message of process. I don’t think there’s anybody in our building that’s suffering for hope right now. There’s no one saying, ‘is this ever going to get better?’ I mean I think we see all these things. We left the last game saying we can’t beat ourselves. We can’t have the ball in the red zone on the 1-yard line and not score. We can’t fumble three times. We can’t turn the ball over four times. So, I think they recognize those things. In terms of how you fix it, Iowa State is a great example of how you fix it. You just go to work every day. You don’t talk a lot, you just play a lot and practice a lot. That’s what we showed our guys.

***On Pooh Stricklin being out for the year, but playing on Saturday…***

“So Pooh [Stricklin] is cleared to play, but I think it’s in his best interest not to play. So, we didn’t practice him all week, and he just said, ‘hey coach I really feel good. The doctor said I’ve felt good. I’ve gotten some rest. I’d like to be available, if needed.’ So, we took him there, and then obviously we needed him. He won’t practice. He’s not practicing today, tomorrow, or Wednesday, so I don’t know if he’ll be available this week. Jared Atkinson is going to have to step up this week and be out starter. We have a lot of confidence in Jared. Behind the scenes, Jared’s done this over the last two or three weeks. We’ll see if we have Pooh or not. That’s kind of one of those things, the day of the game he says to me, ‘I can go’ or ‘I can’t go.’ But to not have practiced all week and to go out there on emergency duty and to have played the way he did, I think it’s a credit to him. So, we’ll see who we have at receiver moving forward. It’s like JaMycal Hasty probably took three snaps at tailback last week during the week. He had to play receiver all week for us. Then all of a sudden he’s in the game, running the football, picking up blitzes. It’s just kind of where we are right now. It’s kind of all hands-on deck, ‘hey can you go over here and do this? Great, go do it.’ We have a lot of stories like that right now which are going to be great for those guys in the long run, because I think Pooh’s going to come back next year and be tough. I think JaMycal’s gaining experience and he really stepped up for us in that game, J-Mike did. There’s some unique stories that are happening right now.”

***On Charlie Brewer’s physical status…***

“I think physically he’s fine. I mean he’s a little banged up, but I think that’s par for the way he plays. He doesn’t really try to avoid hits. We’re actually going to do a slide drill today to get him to slide a little bit when he has the first down. I certainly didn’t go into that game thinking, ‘let’s throw it 63 times.’ He threw that one kind of silly interception before the half. We called a shot in the second half on the second drive, and I’m coaching Charlie [Brewer] right now like he’s a junior or senior. I’m not babying him. He threw the ball away and kind of looked at me on the sideline and gave me a thumbs up, so he’s learning as he goes. Zach [Smith]’s getting healthy now, so we have two guys there. Preston Heard, we’re hoping we can redshirt him, so we’re trying to keep him from playing. I think for Charlie to throw the ball that many times and be as accurate as he was, was impressive, but we do have to correct that interception. We do have to correct the two fumbled meshes, which were him and the back which were obviously critical plays.”

***On the younger players respect for the seniors…***

“I do. I think so. I think there’s two ways that that happens. Number one, I think the way our older players have embraced them has been pretty cool. I think like Xavier Newman is starting as true freshman at left guard next to Mo Porter, who’s a senior left tackle. I think the way Mo [Porter] treats him and pushes him and interacts with him is really a good thing to see. I think having been through everything they’ve been through this year, it’s hard not to develop bonds and closeness. They probably can’t recognize everything they’ve been through, but they recognize who they are and the impact they’re having on them. In addition to that, when I put up the defensive stats of giving up 586 yards passing last year and holding them to 200 yards passing this year, that’s a credit to Taion [Sells] and [Davion Hall] and Chance [Waz]. I talked to the young guys. I say ‘look here’s what we didn’t do in the game. Here’s the things we have to correct to win.’ If our young players don’t learn from our older players, then everything our older players are going through right now is for naught. But if our older players are suffering through what they’re suffering through right now, because they’re playing good football. If they’re suffering through all that, and our young players will learn from it, then everything our older players went through is to help the program move forward. That puts a lot of pressure you’d say or expectation on our young players to learn these lessons now. There’s a lot of lessons to be learned, trust me. Learn these lessons now, so these guys’ sacrifices meant something, and I’m certain that they will.”

***On if he’s seeing the progress he wanted through ten games…***

“Yeah I see the progress. I always like to look at the Big 12’s conference game only statistics. I think there was a time after game two or three where we were last in the country in completion percentage. Right now, just in conference games, I think we’re like the fourth best passing offense, so it’s like Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, West Virginia, and then us. In terms of the passing game, we’ve gone like this. In terms of a pass defense, you know we couldn’t stop Liberty, and now I think we’re fifth or sixth in passing defense in the conference. Is it showing up all the places I want? Is it showing up in our run game? No, we’re not running the football the way I would like and the way we eventually will. Are we tackling as well as I would like? No. Are we tackling way better than we did earlier? Yes. As I said after the game, you can see the progress, but you can’t say it’s good enough. You can see the progress, but you can’t say it’s okay. You can be angry about the result, but still recognize the growth that the guys have had. I’m not saying this like, ‘woe is me.’ I’m saying this more for our players. To have the injuries we’ve had, like especially over at the receiving core, to have last four or five starting receivers, whatever it is three or four starting receivers, and to have a guy who started the season as the third string quarterback go out there and throw for 417, shows that these guys are working their tails off. For Blake Lynch to play corner and receiver, they’re working their tails off. Is it tangible? No, it’s not tangible. I would have liked to have won more games, but when I sit there every day, I see like, ‘boy, look at this guy.’ ‘Coach you need me to play receiver?’ Then he catches a bunch of balls. If we can just continue to do that, continue that trajectory, because I think the one thing the losing has done, like I’ve said, it either makes you or breaks you. It makes you hungry, or it makes you want to quit. It’s made these guys hungry. It’s making them come back to work each week. We’ll see if we’re the hungrier team on Saturday. We’re facing a really hungry team in Iowa State. But I do see the progress. It’s just not good enough yet, but it will be.”

**On if Charlie Brewer will start…**

“Yeah, I think Charlie [Brewer] will start again.”

**On what happened on the opening kickoff…**

“We didn’t get a great kick. We tried to kick the ball to the left numbers, and we’re hoping we’ll kick it with a little more hang time, so the ball went dead in the middle to about the 8-yard line. So, you’re hoping everyone will adjust back, and we didn’t really adjust back over here. Then a guy was unblocked and missed the tackle, and they outran us. You can’t point to any one thing on that one, there were probably a couple of things that weren’t very good, and their best player made a play. At the end of the day, we still had a guy there to make the tackle, and their guy made a play. That’s why he’s up for the Biletnikoff. He’s a special player. It was a good play by him, but disappointed by us. We haven’t covered kicks well really all year, so we’ve got to improve that area.”