**Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule**

**Weekly Press Conference**

**November 21, 2017**

**Opening Statement…**

“First of all, thank you for being here for today for the last press conference as we get ready for the last game of the year. A tremendous opportunity versus a great football team in TCU. A lot of respect for their football program. I certainly had a lot of respect for Coach Patterson as a young coach. He’s one of the guys that I looked up to, and he’s been kind to me since I took this job. It should be a great opportunity to face a top-10 team.

As I’ve told our team, we’ve had a tough year. We’ve had a hard year. We’ve had a lot of growing, and this is one last opportunity for us to look and see how far away we are from getting to where we want to be. We’d like to be TCU at some point in terms of where they are. We’d like to be Oklahoma. We’d like to be in the contention for the Big 12 Championship game. We faced an Iowa State team last week that is in contention for that game. You saw where we stacked up well and where we have to improve. This is one more opportunity to play against a top-10 team and see what exactly we need to do to get to that level. We’ll go out. We’ll play our hearts out, and we’ll let the chips fall where they may.

Moving back to last Saturday, I thought our kids fought hard. I thought they competed. Had every opportunity to win the football game. Obviously losing Taylor [Young] was, not just on the football field but just personally, was just a devastating blow I think for the guys on the team, but I thought Lenoy [Jones, Jr.] stepped in and did a nice job for us. We really played well enough on defense to have a chance to win the game. Offensively, we had the ball in the red zone twice in the fourth quarter and weren’t able to punch it in. We’ll continue to try to improve those areas as we move into this week. Really at the end of the day, the last couple games have come down to turning the ball over and taking the ball away. That’s both sides of the ball. We’re not being dynamic enough on defense right now, taking the ball away, and offensively we’re not protecting the ball when it counts. That certainly will be magnified against the number one defense in the conference this week in TCU. We’ll have to do a tremendous job of protecting the football. Defensively, to have a chance against Kenny Hill and their team, we’re going to have to try to take the ball away at some point. If you look at TCU, I think they do a great job on both sides of the football, Coach Patterson defensively and Sonny [Cumbie] does a tremendously job offensively. They run the football. They’re efficient. They’re a veteran team. I think I counted 13 seniors on their two-deep starting for them, so there’s a lot of experience, a lot of starts, a lot of veteran leadership for them out there. They know how to play good football. It’ll be a great challenge, a great opportunity. As I told our guys, we’ll head into the offseason looking at this game saying, ‘what do we need to do to get to that level?’ With that I’ll see what questions you guys have.”

**On Charlie Brewer’s performance…**

“Yeah I thought Charlie [Brewer] played well in the last game. For as many balls as he’s thrown, I think he has three picks. Obviously, I’d love to have that last one back, but he was kind of in that two minute mode, pushing the ball down the field. Their kid made a nice play, but I thought he took what the defense gave him. They were bound and determined not to let us get behind them. We were able to a couple times, got some pass interference calls. I thought he did a nice job with his feet. I thought he did a nice job keeping the chains moving, getting the ball to JaMycal [Hasty] and those guys. For a young player, I think he’s continuing to develop and play better and better.”

**On the linebacker situation and moving DJ Artis to linebacker…**

“[DJ Artis] has been a guy that we’ve had playing defensive end. In the bye week, we played him a little bit at linebacker, and we think that his future, after having him here, is to play linebacker for us. Just sort of with our depth, we were down to three scholarship linebackers that could go into the game. I guess I should say four, excuse me. So, we moved [Artis] there, at the very least to get him some reps. [Jalen] Pitre can play the Sam and the Will. We can just kind of get him some reps and get ready for next year. That’s just sort of a critical mass at that position.”

**On his year one experience at Baylor…**

“You know what, you might not believe it but it’s been a good experience for me. Certainly, I hate to lose, and so that part is bothersome to me, but I think I’ve enjoyed the interactions and relationships I’ve built with the players. I’ve enjoyed the way the team has come together. I’ve enjoyed the way that they’ve continued to fight week in and week out. I’ve seen the progress that they’re making to get better. I don’t think there’s a guy in that building that doesn’t feel like we’re setting the stage to become a really good football team. I think the seniors, if you were to ask them, I think a lot of them would say, ‘boy I wish I could come back and play another year,’ because I think they see the improvement. They see the way the team is coming together. It’s not tangible in the results, but I think there’s been a lot of sort of building of a foundation. That part I’ve enjoyed. There’s been hard moments. Like anything, there’s been tough moments. There are in every season, but I’ve enjoyed the way our players have been courageous, and tough, and always coming back to work. We came out yesterday and had a good practice last night. They’re a good group to be around. I would have really like to send the seniors out with a win. And really, to be quite honest with you, I don’t know that I can say enough about our fans and our crowd. I mean our student section on Saturday. We’ve been to a lot of other places, and we’ve seen other people’s student sections. We’ve seen other people that maybe they’re down a little bit. To think that our student section would show up in mass to a team with our record on Saturday and stay until the end, it’s really inspiring to be quite honest with you. I think it energizes you as a coach and a player. I think there’s been so many positive things to take out of the year despite the record. I’ll say this again. I don’t think there’s a guy in that building that doesn’t feel like what’s happened has happened for a reason and is preparing us to go out and become a really good football team.”

**On the experience being built from this season moving forward…**

“I think at the end of the day, we always talk about when you build something, you want to build it on a foundation of rock, of stone, of brick. It’s hard to do that. Sometimes you can take a quick fix, and you can cosmetically mask some things. I think anyone that has seen this has seen that we’ve tried to do it the right way, whether it’s been handling of player discipline, suspending guys for games, to not taking cheap ways out of things. We’ve tried to do everything the right way. I say ‘we’, I mean our players. You just get the sense in our building that the foundation is real and will be there for a while. I think they left the game on Saturday facing a team in Iowa State that we have a lot of respect for, and just saying to ourselves, ‘if we can take just a couple more steps. We don’t turn the ball over. We don’t beat ourselves with an illegal man downfield.’ We have the ball first and ten at the 40 going in, and five plays later, they’re up. They hit a 67-yard pass. That’s really our doing, so can we just continue to make progress? I think they get it, and I think they feel like we’re going to be good for a while. I don’t think there’s a guy in that building that’s going to say, ‘hey let’s make it two years.’ I think they’re saying, ‘hey we want to go be good next year because why go through what we’ve gone through if we don’t use it for our good, for our benefit?’ I think if you ask the seniors, I think they’d say, ‘boy I wish I could be here next year.’ But I’ve also told our team, ‘this isn’t about next year. Don’t start looking ahead.’ How we play this game, and we can’t control TCU how good they are, but how we play this game what our offseason is like and who we are. If we go out there against TCU, and we’re just not big and strong enough, then we have to spend the offseason getting bigger and stronger. If we’re not tough enough, we have to spend the offseason getting tougher. If we’re just not talented enough, then we have to continue to develop. We have to really take this as an honest look at ourselves and say, ‘where are we deficient?’ We’re down to not many people with a lot of guys banged up, but the guys that are out there are warriors, and they have to go out there and play at a high level really to have a good snapshot of where we are and where we need to get to moving forward.”

**On overcoming injuries in a short week against a team like TCU…**

”I think Taylor [Young] is one injury, but it’s a significant injury just even for the effect it has all the way down even to the special teams. Deonte Williams he’s out for the game, the effect that that even has on the special teams. It’s not even always in the two deeps. Some guys starting are now running down on the kicks, and that shows up later in the game. We’re going to count on some guys that haven’t played a ton, but they’re ready. They’re playing in the Big 12, and they have a green and gold uniform so they have to go play. For some guys it’s an opportunity. You might wait until the last game to get your chance, but if you go out and do some good things, then you have positive momentum going into the offseason. We’re going to send them out there. And the short week, I don’t think it helps, but they have a short week too. They played a freshman quarterback last week, and he played really well. We’re all just going to deal with it, go have some Thanksgiving, then wake up the next morning and go play ball. I can’t think of anything better.”

**On what he saw in Charlie Brewer when recruiting him…**

“I think the biggest thing that jumped out to me was his accuracy. Players develop. Players get better. Players improve. But at the end of the day, they usually kind of do in college what they did in high school. If you’re really honest with yourself, if you take away all the ratings and the stars and the 40-yard dash, if you take all that stuff away, usually when you look at the tape when they’re a junior or senior in college, they’re doing what they were as a junior or senior in high school. Charlie I think set some sort of a record at I think 78%, and right now, Taylor [Bryan] hands me this stuff all the time, I think he’s 68.6% which is I think second all-time as a freshman, second only to Sam Bradford. He’s just really, really accurate. He hasn’t played a ton, but is kind of just out there on instinct, he’s pretty accurate. I think his legs had people play him a little differently. I think his offensive line has gotten better week by week in terms of protection. He’s been able to keep some drives alive by stepping up and scrambling for a first down, but also kind of stepping up and finding a back. Those things have helped us. I thought Zach did that well early on, but our offensive line wasn’t protecting very well. Zach [Smith] was taking a ton of hits. I think our offensive line has really made some improvements over the past four weeks in terms of the way that they’ve played in the protection game. I do think Charlie’s biggest asset would be his accuracy, and that was in high school, and it shows up again here in college.”

**On the progress that has been made over the past three weeks…**

“Yeah even on Saturday I think we had two ridiculous, our guys would say, pass plays which we would like to have back. You take that away, for being down some guys, I thought our guys hung in there and competed. I think it’s clicking for a lot of guys. I think our corners played at a high, high level on Saturday. You’re playing with some veterans out there who have played a lot of football, but it’s just such a different way of playing defense, not better not worse just different, that takes time to get adjusted to. It takes time for all the communication and the checks. They’re getting it. You’d love to go play another four or five games to help them get it. This will continue to develop through the offseason. It’ll continue to develop through the spring. They’ll look back in a year and be like, ‘oh my goodness, look where we were to where we are now.’ I did that for them after the Oklahoma State game film. I think I told you guys. Oklahoma State, we were upset. There were some questions. Why do we practice as hard as we do if we’re not getting the results we wanted? I had to go back and show them the football, not the results, but just the football and how much it had improved. And it’s come that far since then. Now you’ve lost some guys. You’ve lost some good players, but the guys that are out there playing have just improved, and improved, and improved. You look up this time next year, and Lenoy [Jones] and Jordan Williams, they won’t recognize themselves. They’re playing well, but they’ll be playing that much better. Our defensive line, they won’t recognize themselves. It takes time, but every day kind of compounds on the day before.”

**On the level of competition that Brewer and Shawn Robinson played at in high school, stepping in to start…**

“Yeah and Xavier Newman has started for us at guard all year in the Big 12, and he was blocking for Shawn last year at Desoto. I think that those guys have been in big environments, but more importantly they’ve played for tremendous coaches. They’ve played in real systems. Playing at Desoto, playing at Lake Travis, you’re going to walk in extremely prepared to play college football. I think it’s also a credit to those two guys. They’re competitors. They’re winners. I thought Shawn was outstanding in high school, I think Charlie was outstanding in high school, so they were also really good players. They played at real places in real systems. They were really prepared to come to college.”

**On if he’s gotten a sense for watching film on and preparing for Big 12 teams…**

“Two things: I think you can never underestimate as a coach how much you really don’t know about your team until after the first year. You think you know, but you really don’t know. It’s filled sometimes with pleasant surprises. You just kind of have to go to battle with guys, and go through highs and lows. You find out a lot about good players, and you find out, like we’ll get to the spring and I think there’s some guys that can be pros at other positions. I don’t ever make a guy move, but I’ll say, ‘I think you could be this.’ I couldn’t do it right away because I didn’t know anybody, but I think you get after that first season, you really know your team. You know what you need. You know where you need to improve. You know what you’re much better at than you thought. I think that’s part of it. I also think you get through the league, and you see, ‘okay, how strong are we compared to everybody else? How fast are we compared to everybody else? Where do we need to improve? Where do we need to focus our recruiting?’ We’ve played a lot of veteran teams, and I’m not talking about our youth. This is a veteran team that we’re facing, now with some great young players, don’t get me wrong, but a veteran team. You have to kind of in your mind say, ‘what will we look like when we’re a veteran team? What will we look like when we have three senior offensive linemen out there next year?’ I think going through the league helps you say, ‘what can our guys do? Where do we need to improve?’ Then as you get into the season next year, really even in terms of practice and everything. It’s meant a lot to me in terms of learning Baylor. We’ve changed practice schedules as we’ve tried to make sure that we push our players, but at the same time don’t sacrifice their grades and give them the best opportunity to be in study hall. There’s been a lot of learning curve from the league to our players to just how things work here, and I think we’ve settled in on a lot of things. This will be a great final test, but I think as we move forward, we feel good about who we have and what we need to do to be successful.”

**On what he is most thankful for…**

“Well I’m certainly most thankful for my family and my wife and my kids. Even on a personal level, we moved here. My wife hadn’t picked out anything in the house. She’s done everything for our family. You talk about a year where her dad comes to see the Oklahoma State game, and he’s in the hospital for 30 days, 28 days whatever it was after that. He just comes one day, then all of the sudden he’s in the hospital. My daughter falls and breaks her arm, and she’s in the hospital, like back to back Sundays. At the end of the day my wife, she keeps pushing me forward. Every Thursday, she has a different position group over, even if she has to make the food, go to the hospital to see her dad, and come back. I’m grateful for my wife. I’m grateful for my kids. I’m grateful that my parents are here. Even though her dad had to come here and spend his time in the hospital, I’m grateful he’s here.

I’m grateful for these players and these players’ families. It has got to be so hard to be the family member or the parents of a player on this team, who their kids are going through this tough season, and I wasn’t part of their recruiting process. They don’t really know me, and the trust that I think they’ve shown us in allowing us to coach their players. You know you go through this hard time, and really when we wake up Monday morning, as far as I’m concerned, we’ve walked through the valley. It’s time to start climbing. Really there’s been so much trust by the players, by their families, by our families. I talk about my family, but the coach’s families, they’ve been there every step of the way with us through this tough, tough season.

As a collective Baylor football family, I’m grateful. I’d say again, I’m blown away by the support of the people here. We pulled up. We were on the golf cart the other day going around campus. I forget where we were going, and Mike Wallace who works for me. Big Mike, he’s from Philly, we’re all from kind of up north. We pull up, and a person rolls the window down and I’m like, ‘here it comes.’ And he’s like, ‘hey coach, we love you. We’re praying for you. We know what you guys are doing. Keep doing it.’ Then he rolls the window back up, and Mike looks at me and says, ‘we’re not in Philly anymore.’ I love Philly, don’t get me wrong, but I think everyone here recognizes that we’re just trying to push things forward. We’re just trying to, like Nehemiah, just stand up and build together. I’m very grateful for those opportunities, for those people. I guess at the end of the day I’m just grateful for a lot of people that are around right now and how supportive everyone has been.”

**On the effect of transfers currently sitting out on team…**

“I think Christian Beard, sitting out coming in from UCF. He would have helped us this year. Jake Fruhmorgen. Started two years at Clemson. When you have a great player like Mo [Porter] graduating, we are hopeful that Jake can come in and help. Jalen Hurd was like 400 yards away from being Tennessee’s all-time leading rusher. He’s an elite athlete and an elite player. He’s a competitive, competitive, competitive football player. I think he’ll bring a tremendous amount to the team. James Lockhart sat out this year after spending two years at A&M. I don’t know that there is anyone more bought in to our process, the way we practice, the way we do things, the attention to detail. He’s down there on the scout team defense and he makes the scout team defense guys do everything that Phil [Snow] makes the defense do. He’s training them right now.

Those guys, sometimes when you go off to college and you redshirt as a freshman, you’re just kind of like ‘alright what am I doing.’ Those guys went and played, now they came to Baylor and now they’ve had a chance to redshirt in a transfer year. They’re a little bit older, a little bit more mature, with a little bit better focus about what they want to do and they put a lot of work in. They will bring a lot of production and a lot of proper mindset to the guys that we already have. I think we get guys back from injury. We are sitting over there before the game the other day look at the sideline and there’s Gavin [Holmes], there’s [Chris] Platt, there’s RJ [Sneed] – there’s a lot of production standing over there and then there’s Jalen Hurd. That’s four receivers standing there. Take those guys and add them with [Denzel] Mims has done and the way [Jared Atkinson] has stepped up, you feel good about where we could possibly head.

**On plan for team on holiday week…**

“We’ll let the guys that are not traveling to the game, we’ll let them go home Wednesday. There’s no class Wednesday, so we will practice from like 11-1 and then let them go home, be with their families, and be back Monday for a team meeting. They guys are traveling, we will get up Thursday morning and we’ll walkthrough here and then we’ll head up to Ft. Worth. We found a little Brazilian steakhouse that we ate at before the Texas Tech game. We’ll do Thanksgiving dinner there. We’ve invited our coach’s families if they wanted to come. Thanksgiving dinner Brazilian steakhouse style. At the end of the day, we are together. I know for our players its hard, because they are not with their families, but after the game on Friday we will cut them loose for the weekend and let them go home and see their families Saturday and Sunday. Monday morning, we will come back and be ready to finish strong in school.”

**On how to compete against TCU’s defense…**

I think you have to run good solid football plays and let your guys go make plays. What they do is they just play football. There is no gimmick. There’s no how do we figure it out. They have really good players at every level of the defense – the d-line, the linebackers, the secondary. They lineup and they play man-on-man football. They’re going to play bump-and-run versus our receivers. They are going to have their safeties come down in the run fits and put their corners on islands. They’ve got a bunch of vets back there. They’re not afraid to do that. Their defensive line is stout and strong. They’ve got pass rushers. There’s nothing gimmicky about it. It’s beautiful to watch. It’s just football. They have wrinkles and they attack what you do. Their guys get off blocks, very similar to Iowa State. They are out there playing ball. When I look at how they play, it’s fun to watch as a coach that respects that type of football. They are good at every position on defense. To me, you have to line up and run your best stuff and go make plays. Don’t turn the ball over, try to convert on third down, find a way to run the football and if you have a chance, if it’s a one-on-one ball, go up and catch the ball. Go make the play. There’s no gimmicks to it. It’s just pretty straight up.

**On KJ Smith possibly coming back…**

“I would say this, I think the fact that KJ would like to come back and play for us is such a significant statement by him. I think he was grateful that we wanted him back. I said, ‘Are you kidding me?’ KJ Smith is a good student, he’s a really good person. He’s been hurt all year, and all he does is every Monday night when the d-line comes to my office and gets chicken and watches football, he’s there. He sits in every meeting, he’s there to support his teammates. He’s battled through the adversity. So, we’ve never really seen K.J. healthy. But, when he’s healthy, he’s a really, really good football player. So, there’s a very positive football effect. But, I think the fact that he’s at this stage of his life and he would like to come back and play one more year for Baylor, play one more year for us, really play one more year for Coach E, our d-line coach, Coach Robinson, I think that speaks to the health of the program and what’s going on. And when he said that to me, that was a significant . . . much like Taylor deciding to come back, having another guy say, ‘Hey, I want to be a part of this for another year,’ because that means another year of waking up at 5:30 in the morning and rolling around and doing mat drills and another year of running all summer. He wants to move on at some point, but he wants to come back and play for Baylor again. And I think that’s significant. I hope it works out for me, because he’s a great, great young man. It will help him in his chance of going and playing in the NFL someday. And it will certainly help our football team having that production back.”

**On how he feels about chances of KJ getting waiver…**

“I think it’s all paperwork and people way beyond me, but I think we feel good about it. And either way, if not, we’ll support him no matter what.”

**On desire to sign a quarterback every year…**

“Yes, and because we only have two scholarship quarterbacks, you would have liked to have brought in two quarterbacks this year. But, we’re focused on bringing in one quarterback this year. We’d like to bring one quarterback in every year.”

**On importance of the 2018 recruiting class…**

“I’ve talked so much, the foundation has been laid by the guys who were this year, the guys who were willing to stay here and fight when they didn’t have to. And then, I think the foundation is being built. I think this offseason, with the guys coming back and the junior class that I’ve talked about that are going to become seniors, all these freshmen that we’ve played and the transfers, I think we’re going to have a chance to build something that’s special.

It will be this freshman class coming in that’s making the decision to come here right now off a team that has one win. It’s making a decision to come here when people around them would say, ‘Why would you go there?’ that will put Baylor over the top and keep us over the top for a long time. That’s how significant this class is, because No. 1, they’ll be coming for the right reasons. They’ll be coming because they see opportunity where other people see adversity. They’ll be coming because they believe in the mission of the football program and in the mission of the University. If they’ve been to our games, they’ve seen what’s happening at our games. I think a lot of guys have recognized what’s special about Baylor. They recognize that the fans are going to support them, win, lose or draw; that they’re more than just a football player, they’re a person, first and foremost, and a part of the University. It will be this class that will allow our success we’re going to have over the next couple of years, it will be the class that allows it to perpetuate from there. So, it’s a vital class. We’ll play the game and start recruiting immediately, but we’ve got some really, really tremendous young men and really some tremendous families that have already said they’re going to join us. And that’s what we need. We need great people from great families, from great high school programs, that want to come in and have a shot to play early and that want to come in and be a part of one of the great comeback stories in college football. That’s what this will be, and that’s what they’re signing up to do.”