**Baylor head football coach Matt Rhule**

**December Signing Day Press Conference**

**December 20, 2017**

*Opening statement…*

“Thank you for coming on a good day for the program. I appreciate you guys covering us as we talk about these wonderful young men who made the decision to come to Baylor University. They will always be a special class to us in that so many of them committed before the season, and to go through the year to not have any de-commit, to have them stay with us is truly something special.

We’re excited about them, we’re excited about the versatility they bring. A lot of players on offense, especially the offensive line, allow us to sort of replenish that offensive line group that was decimated upon our arrival. To have the guys that were here and last year’s class and this year’s class were really important.

To get some safety help, especially at the midyear, six of these young men will be here Jan. 7 to start school, two of whom, J. T. Woods and Christian Morgan, project at safety. Hopefully that will answer some needs to go out there and get a couple of receivers, not just receiver but guys who will go out there and play football and run track, I’m really excited.

To have a quarterback in Gerry Bohanon, a young man who we think is special, to get that commitment yesterday, was really something we were excited about. All the players are special young men and they came here for the right reasons, and I’m really excited about them. We expect to have another signing tomorrow, and that will carry us into January with the last three or four spots to go recruit.”

On importance of signing Bohanon…

“It was really, really important. I think Gerry [Bohanon] along with many of the young people, I think he was sort of a unifying force. As it came down the stretch, really talented offensive skill players like Josh Fleeks, Tyquan Thornton, Jackson Gleeson, the tight ends Christoph Henle, Ben Sims, Bralen Taylor, a lot of other schools with this new early signing period, it’s the first time we’ve really dealt with the new signing period, so it wasn’t just ‘Hey come to our school. It was Hey don’t sign early, just wait until January.’ What Gerry was able to do was tell them Hey, our all you guys still signing on Wednesday? In the end when he signed it sort of solidified the class. I think we had a lot of good players, a lot of other people wanted the young men to wait or come to their school, and I think he was just sort of a final force. It’s just kind of who Gerry is. It’s his personality. When you go to Earle, Arkansas, and you walk through the school, you can tell he is a person who lives his life trying to be there for other people, so the whole community is behind him. I think he’ll have that same effect on this recruiting class and hopefully on this team.”

*On ability to focus month of December on recruiting…*

“I always prefer being in a bowl game, but I think we were able to focus our resources on this. Our whole staff was amazing. There were guys like Francis Brown, what he did over the last three weeks, he literally would get to a hotel at 1 and he’s up at 3 getting on a plane to fly somewhere else. It just took a lot of time and effort. We had a lot of relationships with the players already built, and with their families already built.

In this kind of mad dash where new staffs come in and there are some staff changes, a new coach comes in to be able to get out on the road. I’ve never gone this far for two weeks straight. It’s usually over six weeks. I think it’s a credit to our guys. So maybe it’s a blessing in disguise, but hopefully we’ll never have to deal with it again.”

*On how many visits he made during the week…*

“The first week I meet with every player on the team. That week I was probably out four days. I was probably in 25 people’s homes in high school. You go Sunday through Thursday, and Friday we’re here for the official visits. I racked up my frequent flyer miles. Most of the kids are from Texas obviously, but to recruit a kid from Florida, a kid from Arkansas, a kid from Colorado, and a kid from Baton Rouge, that takes a little bit of time as well.”

*On how Christoph Henle ended up at Baylor…*

“Christoph [Henle] played football in Austria and was one of the better players on his team there. Somehow they arranged for him to go to the Oakridge School. He had a host family and went to school there. He was a kid who was being recruited and came to our camp, and gained some offers. He’s played on the Austrian national team, he’s played here in high school, and he’s a midyear. I sat my alarm this morning for 4 a.m. because he had flown back, and when the flight landed he was going to send his paper here because it would be 7 a.m. their time. So he’s a really good student and has already been out on his own. He’ll be here midyear, so we’re excited about that.

Coming in midyear would be Gerry Bohanon, Christoph Henle, Christian Morgan, Casey Phillips, Tyquan Thornton, and J.T. Woods.”

*On benefit of football players running track…*

“That’s intentional. It’s always been our philosophy, big and fast. When you find guys who are elite speed-wise you hope they can play receiver, and if they can’t, if they don’t have the body control and the hands, then they usually turn themselves into NFL defensive backs. We just want to have as fast a team as possible, and these guys are all really fast. The allure of letting guys play football and running track, the fact we did that with Chris Platt last year, if you’re one of these young men who want to run track at the next level. We have Obim [Okeke] over there playing basketball right now, we have guys on the track team, knowing you can freely do that here, that was a tremendous draw to them. We’re hopeful we’ll be able to sign a couple of really fast people over the next day and they can have the best of both worlds. You can run track with an elite program and also come over here and play football.”

*On Tyquan Thornton…*

“The first thing I’d say if you really kind of find out what a coaching staff is like when you de-commit from a school and how they handle you. One thing you hear a lot of our players say in the recruiting process is we talk a lot about who you are and having a relationship and being a family and caring about who you are beyond just football. When Tyquan de-committed from us I still talked to him about life and things that mattered. I still talked to him about his family, just not with that same frequency. I think Francis Brown just did an amazing job there, I think Evan Cooper did a tremendous job there, and they just kept that connection going. As situations shook up at other schools, we were sort of already there and had a relationship. We believed Baylor would be a great fit for him, a chance to play football and run track. While it is far away from home, it’s chance for him to experience something different. I think the consistency of the relationship between Francis [Brown] and Tyquan and Evan and Tyquan eventually led to him taking a visit. His family said Hey this is a great place and we can see Tyquan having a lot of success here.”

*On what he would like to accomplish with final few spots in class…*

“We’d probably like to just find a couple difference-makers. Probably the best available as we look out there. There’s some real difference-makers in the state. And we hope to just sign the best players available, because we’re probably whole at a lot of positions. Maybe not exactly where we’d like to be. But if you start just going for need, you don’t always end up with the best players. We’ll try to find the best available, the best fits for us.”

*Do those remaining spots include recruits who are committed…*

“That was just in general. There’s always different stories with each person, right? So, it could be an academic situation. So, I don’t want to get into . . . obviously, I’m not allowed to. But to me, the guys who signed today are with us. And if there’s anybody that didn’t, it’s either for a reason or they’re still looking. And we’re still recruiting probably eight, nine people for those last couple spots. And then I think what’s going to happen in college football in general is everyone’s going to sit back and say, ‘OK, who’s still out there?’ There will be some guys who you all of a sudden see and you say, ‘Wow, that’s my kind of guy.’ So, I’m always looking for the next Ashton Logan, who we signed last year who I think is going to be a great, great player here. I’m always looking for a player like that. So, we’ll evaluate. We haven’t taken this week off. We’re in the office right now still working, still recruiting. We’ll work tomorrow. So, we’ll have to kind of see.”

*On players enrolling for spring…*

“I think the early enrollees, it’s a tremendous help for them. It can be hard. But they have a chance to come in and learn the system and learn the football when it’s not quite as fast. They have a chance to come here and get acclimated to college, earn 15 credits and then hopefully six or nine in the summer, and go into your freshman year with 24 credits already in your pocket. And it’s just a chance to get bigger, faster, stronger, and be around the guys. So that way when the freshmen show up in June, you’re sort of the elder statesmen of the freshmen.

I think at positions like safety, that’s vital to us. For Gerry [Bohanon] as a quarterback, for Tyquan [Thornton] as a receiver, to come in and learn what we’re doing, I think that’s really important. For Christoph [Henle], we graduated both of our tight ends. Tyler Henderson is a really, really good prospect who redshirted for us last year. But at the tight end position, we really only have Tyler and anybody else that we’re going to move there. To have Christoph be able to emerge as a tight end as well. So, they’re all positions of need, and I think it will really help them to have that time.

*On Bohanon and Charlie Brewer pushing each other at QB…*

“I probably don’t have the greatest of plans in terms of moving forward yet. But it’s kind of all we’ll see what happens, to be honest. But I love the fact that when Gerry [Bohanon] came on his visit, Charlie [Brewer] was there to help in any way that he could. And that Gerry knows Charlie played last year. Because what I want is I want unbelievably competitive quarterbacks.

I was going to be on ESPNU, so I was listening and they had another coach on, how they started a freshman and they signed the No. 1 quarterback in the country. And he was saying, ‘he wants to be around other great players and he wants to be pushed.’

At the end of the day, it’s not about ‘hey how easy is it for me to get on the field?’ It’s about how good of a player do I become. And you don’t become a great player unless you have competition, you don’t become a great player unless you’re pushed and you have to be at your best every day. And you don’t become a great player unless you’re around other good players.

So, if you’re a quarterback, to be around these elite wideouts that are already here that are all going to get healthy and Jalen (Hurd) who has sat out a year. We’re going to be pretty strong. And to have this influx of talent with Tyquan [Thorton] and Jackson [Gleeson] and Josh Fleeks, that to me, you want to be around great players, but you also want to compete. So, the fact that they both know each other is there, and they’re looking at it as an opportunity to become the best they can be, that’s exciting to me.

*On desired number of scholarship quarterbacks…*

“I’d like to have five scholarship quarterbacks. I think that’s where your program should be. But when I took the job, I said this roster situation we walked into here is unique. I think I was telling someone today, to take six offensive linemen last year and six offensive linemen this year is not really conducive to getting all the other positions you need. But it’s what we have to do right now. We thought we could get three, we’re at two right now. If something happens, great. If not, I have a lot of confidence in Preston Heard, and we are where we are. But at the end of the day, I know we have two really good quarterbacks. We have Charlie, who proved what he can do. And Gerry, who I have all the faith in the world in. So, just look at the positive part of it, and we’ll just continue to move forward.”

*On coaching changes effecting recruiting…*

“I don’t know. I wouldn’t speculate on that, personally. I just feel like since Gerry came here this summer, I always felt like Gerry was going to be our quarterback. He just connected with us. I think he looked at the opportunity to play for Coach (Glenn) Thomas. Not very often in college football do you have a chance to play for a guy who coached in the NFL at the quarterback position for six years, who coached Matt Ryan, who coached in the Pro Bowl. He was telling stories about coaching Mike Vick in the Pro Bowl. So, I think he looked at it like hey this is a university that matches what I’m looking to do and they have the right coach. So, I always felt like he was going to be our quarterback. So to me, it was never about, ‘Hey, is he not going to go there?’ It was always, ‘Is Gerry going to come here?’ But, he wanted to do it on his own time. He wanted to take visits, he wanted to look around. And we respected that. And we respected his mother, who’s a wonderful woman. She’s an educator and she’s a principal. So, he was going to do his due diligence. And his father said he was going to do his due diligence. But from the time he set foot on campus, I just kind of always felt like that guy’s going to be our quarterback.”

*On recruitment of BJ Hanspard…*

“BJ was committed to another school for a long, long time. That coaching change happened, and that opened up. BJs’ father is a minister, his grandfather is a minister. So, this is a school whose Christian mission is certainly in line with what BJ stands for. He has Xavier Newman here, a teammate (at DeSoto), playing. He had a relationship with Gerry from kind of being different places. That was one that kind of committed before we really got to know him. And as I had a chance to sit down with BJ and with his father and with his mother and with his two brothers, what a special mature young man. It became clear pretty quickly that he was a tremendous fit for what we’re doing. I think one of the things about Coach Snow’s defense is you have to really be intelligent and you have to really be mature and you have to really love football and want to study football. And clearly, that’s where BJ is and that’s who he is. So, it just seemed like a good fit.

I actually played against his father in college. Now when I say play, I think I was on the sidelines watching more than I was actually playing. But one of the great things about his father is that he never talks about his own career. Everything is about his son and his son’s path, and I think BJ felt like this was the place for me.”

*On Hanspard’s famous locker room speeches…*

“I saw that after we got to know him. With a lot of these guys, we had a relationship with them for a long time. BJ’s was hey, he’s opening his recruitment. I watched him and I said I liked him. Joey (McGuire) went and saw him. He came on his visit. And literally when he walked in to visit – we’re usually downstairs in this building when they first get here – and I know everybody, I’m hugging everybody. I kind of said to myself, ‘Is that a junior college kid or a transfer or is that someone’s older brother?’ because he’s just such a mature looking young man, he’s such a mature acting young man. He really is special. To hear him talk, and to have conversations with him, he’s just so thoughtful. I can see why he would be such a great orator before the games. I got a chance to see that. It was pretty cool.”

*On not losing any recruits during tough season…*

“I think it shows a lot of things. I think it shows No. 1, that Baylor means something to them. You’re not coming to Baylor just because they have a good football program. You’re coming here because this is a life-changing opportunity, to get an education, to go to a school at a wonderful place whose mission fits what they’re looking for. So that in and of itself speaks to Baylor. I think it speaks to the players on our team that they developed relationships with some of them. They knew some of them. And when they came on their visits, I think the guys were really real with them. Hey, this is what Coach Rhule’s going to be like. This is what Coach Snow’s going to be like. This is what Coach Fran is going to be like. But at the end of the day, all these players, they saw us at our lowest. So, I think that’s the one thing as we talk about the relationships we have with the guys on the team, with these recruits, if you were there with us after we lost that Liberty game and you walked off the field, that was the lowest of the lows for us. And yet, we didn’t change. We were who we were. We just kept continuing to do what we do. I think young people are always looking for consistency. So, hopefully these recruits saw consistency in our approach and saw consistency in the approach of the players. I think they saw improvement, they saw hope, they saw us get better. I think many of them were touched by our fans. To be at those games, even though we weren’t victorious, the fans stood and cheered. I think it said to our players, hey, this really is a special place. And I think it probably speaks to relationships. Our relationships with our players aren’t built on how well you play or how well you win, it’s based upon who you are and what you do. A lot of these guys, where other people might see adversity, they see opportunity.

To be honest, I’m shocked. I’m not shocked, I’m excited, that we did have the record we had and no one decommitted from us. They stood firm. And that’s not without people battering against them, hey, come here, come there. But in the end, these guys are going to do something special. They’re going to be part of this remarkable turnaround, just like all the other guys on our team. I think they wanted to do something special, so that’s what they’ll do.”

*On hoping some of the O-Line commits coming in a playing this fall…*

“Yeah, I hope that a couple of them can help us play. We will be a little bit more whole this year with [Jake] Fruhmorgen having two years left. We have [Blake] Blackmar, Pat Lawrence, and [Sam] Tecklenberg back. Xavier Newman and Ryan Miller are both back that played. We have Josh Malin who really developed into a solid offensive lineman this year, he just needs a great offseason. Then, we have all of the other guys who didn’t play or who redshirted such as Eleasah [Anderson] or Henry Klinge and all of the other guys. We have Khalil Keith who underwent a semester off to focus on his academics, he will be with us in the spring. I was at the Katy game this Saturday watching Connor Galvin. He is really big and athletic and he was texting me this morning asking me about plays. He is a football guy. I think this will really give us some size and talent and those who are ready to play will play and those who aren’t will have a chance to redshirt and get bigger faster and stronger.”

*On where he sees Princeton Pines playing…*

“I try every offensive lineman out at tackle first, because tackles are so hard to find. He does have the length to play tackle, but he has the size power and girth of a guard. He is a guy who came to our camp and if you can impress Coach [George] Deleone, you’re doing something right because it’s pretty hard to do. I mean he has coached Joe Thomas. When Princeton left our camp that day Coach Deleone said he needed to be a scholarship lineman. He has only said that to me about three or four kids since we have been together for however many years. Princeton is big, powerful, explosive, extremely intelligent and a great student who comes from a great family.”

*On not signing any junior college players…*

“I’ve recruited junior college players and I have had success with junior college players so I have nothing against them and we will probably visit a couple junior college players and they might come in January. In terms of wholesale I enjoy the process of taking a 17 or 18-year-old and watching them develop until they are 22. That process the way we practice, eat, lift, and everything else is important to us. Over time we think that the process is infallible. Over my career I’ve taken a couple junior college and transfer players and I really just like to go out and get as many young high schoolers as possible. Put them in the program and let them develop and see what we have.”

*On KJ Smith’s Medical Redshirt being filed…*

“I believe it has been filed and it is in the hands of the authorities.”

*On Drew Galitz rehab progression…*

“I think Drew [Galitz] is coming along fine. He had a successful surgery and rehab is on schedule to this point and he has been in really good spirits. Knowing the kind of person Drew is, I know he will come back even better than before.”

*On signing Josh Landry…*

“Josh [Landry] is a guy we really liked off of the tape. We really enjoyed watching him, and we had him come to camp. He came and worked with Coach [Elijah] Robinson and he ran really well. He’s a guy that’s similar to James Lynch, we thought James was going to come in a redshirt but made some plays and became a Freshman All-American. Josh can come in and be a defensive end or a defensive tackle. He brings a ton of versatility to this team. I really like his motor he comes from a great program being at Lamar with Coach Nolan and while he is highly rated I think he is still underrated. He is one of the guys early on we said we had to get him in the program.”

*On thoughts of the early signing period…*

“I have long been a proponent of early signing day. I know there are some debates about when it occurs and like everything you do there will always be some downside as with any change. It removes some of the extra frivolous stuff that goes along with recruiting. I think for the young men who knew where they wanted to go they were able to make that decision and put an end to the recruiting process and go back to being a kid and have the ability to be a student and enjoy the end of high school. For those who didn’t sign today, maybe they weren’t ready to decide and that is ok, they have until January to make that decision.”

*On the impact of the early period…*

“I do, I have long been a proponent of it and, you know, there have been debates on when it is, as with anything you do, there’s going to be a downside and with any change there is going to be something that people don’t like, but I think it removes some of the extra frivolous stuff around recruiting and came down to ‘where do I want to go to college. If I don’t know where I want to go to college, I have a whole extra month to wait.’ It has allowed us to make decisions and remove some of the talking. Some people tell these guys I’m going to offer them a scholarship and I handed them a letter of intent today and scholarship papers. Instead of talking I acted and players either signed them or they didn’t and so now they acted, you know, I think the one thing some people don’t realize is that for a lot of these guys the pressure of having coaches in your house every night, the pressure of coaches texting you 24/7, it becomes a lot and this is an opportunity for them to say, ‘You know what, I’m done,’ and if they are not playing, then so be it continue the process, but if they are done then they have a chance just to shut it off and go be a kid again, go enjoy Christmas, go enjoy my spring and I think you saw from our class a lot of guys knew where I want to go, let me just shut it down and go be a student.”

*On Bralen Taylor’s versatility…*

“Bralen [Taylor] is the type of guy that could play receiver, could play tight end, could play H-Back, he’s really someone who is kind of a unique weapon you can kind of put anywhere and that is why we listed him as an athlete. We are really happy with Ben Sims, you know he was one of the first people we offered. He was walking into Junior Day and I saw Ben and said to him, ‘We are going to offer you a scholarship,’ and he is kind of that prototypical move tight end and Christoph [Henle] is more of that prototypical tight end and Bralen we are going to just work on him because he is just so big and so athletic. I went and watched him work out one day and he was doing DB drills and he looked like a DB. I think that when they are that big and just that athletic that we take them and just see where Bralen’s future kind of moves to so that is why we listed him as an athlete.”

*On areas to address with final few spots…*

“When you take a look at our roster, the depth of our roster at quarterback and at running back aren’t exactly at where we want them to be. Obviously, quarterback more so than anywhere else. But I think it’s good enough at a point where we’re kind of whole in all the different places and it allows us to go out and say, ‘who are the best available players’ opposed to ‘hey, we need to go fill in these gaps.’ I really want these last few spots to come down to ‘hey, that guy can really make a difference, that guy can make a difference’ and I feel pretty good about being at that place right now.

*On how many of the guys can or will run track…*

“Some of the guys that aren’t here are track guys, some of them are debating on if they want to run track. We are certainly open to them running and playing football. I really believe that there is nothing better than getting out there and competing. For example, while everyone else is at home Obim [Okeke] is out playing on the basketball team, completing and working out.”