Baylor Football Head Coach Matt Rhule
Weekly Press Conference
August 27, 2018

**Opening statement …**First of all, I’d like to thank all of you guys for being here, but more importantly for all your coverage and telling all the stories of all the great things our kids are doing really all summer long but especially during camp. We appreciated you guys coming out day-in and day-out and bearing with me and schedules and things like that. Thank you very much.

Obviously, we’re excited to get to game week. The guys have worked really hard, it’s been a long time coming. I’m proud of the work they’ve put in, really since the end of last season, through the winter, through the spring, through the summer. They’ve really weathered the storm. And I’m really excited to see them go out and represent Baylor and represent their families and most importantly represent their team and themselves.

We have a tremendous opportunity this Saturday with Abilene Christian coming in. We know that they’re a good football team. Coach (Adam) Dorrel is a tremendous coach, three Division II national titles. Jermaine Jackson, their defensive coordinator, is a coach that I have a lot of respect for. We’ll look forward to playing a great football team, playing a great football game, and hopefully our team can prepare well this week and go out and let it rip on Saturday.

I know we released our depth chart. I know you guys are going to ask me a ton of questions about the depth chart, which I certainly understand. But, I think especially in first games, the thing I’ve told our team is the depth chart we released was representative of if we were going to play that day. We have a lot of guys that have been banged up for a day or two or three or four. Maybe they’re a 2 now, they’re coming back and they have an opportunity this week to see if they can win the job.

We’re going to play a lot of guys on defense, we feel like we can play a lot of guys on offense. We’ll compete throughout the week, and the guys that have the best week will play. That’s philosophically everything that we believe, that nothing is handed to you in life. You earn everything that you get. And we want our guys to continue to earn everything they get through this week.

We do have a couple guys that won’t be available for the first game. Greg Roberts, for this summer disciplinary issues, will miss the first game and a half. Ashton Logan will miss the first two games. Brandon Thompson will miss the first two games. And as many of you know, JaMycal Hasty will miss the first half of the Kansas game because of his role in that altercation against TCU. That’s a Big 12 discipline that they handed down. Those are the off-field issues that we will deal with.

We have some other guys that are banged-up that I know you will ask me about, but we have a lot of guys that have worked hard. They’re prepared to go play, and we hope that they’ll play with humble confidence.

The biggest thing for me is we have prepared. We are going to go out there on Saturday and let it rip and play with an edge that I know we have inside of us. And I’m anxious to see them do it.

**On importance of getting off to a good start after last year …**
I don’t think last year has anything to do with this year. If we were 12-0, I’m sure Nick Saban is telling his guys, ‘Hey, let’s get off to a good start.’ And I will say, and I mean that very respectfully, I just want our kids to go win because they want to win. I think sometimes when we focus on the past, we end up being victims of that. Last year is over, we have to go play.

That’s the message I said about are we going to go play with confidence. To me, one of the keys to this football team, but keys in life, are you going to wait to have success to be confident, or are you going to have confidence before you have success? No one can give you confidence. Like as parents, sometimes we think if we tell our kids, ‘Hey, you can do anything,’ that they’ll be confident. Kids know when confidence is real, and it comes from demonstrated ability.

They’ve worked so hard, our players have prepared so far, and they’ve gone against each other. We practiced Saturday night till 11:30 at night, in the stadium. A lot of times on that Saturday practice before the first game, they don’t want to get hurt and they hold back. It was our best practice. The GPS monitors said it was the second-fastest practice, and that’s at the end of camp. So, they should be confident. Now, that’s humbled confidence. As Coach (Tom) Coughlin said, ‘We have to be humble enough to prepare and confident enough to perform’ against a good football team.

I’m hopeful that we’ll put that first. And if we do, confidence will get easier and easier. No matter what happens in life, winners just keep saying what’s next and keep moving forward.

**On the quarterback competition …**I’ll say this, Jalan has come in here as a guy that has all the tools. He sat behind Jacoby Brissett, who’s an NFL starter, and he played a little bit here and there. Sat behind (Ryan) Finley, who they project to be an NFL guy. And he’s done nothing but work. He’s in there at 6 o’clock in the morning, he’s in there at 11 o’clock at night. He’s a grinder. And he’s got all the physical tools.

Sometimes coming into their second year, quarterbacks can hit a little bit of a slump because they try to do too much; they try to be perfect. And Charlie’s greatest quality is he just plays free. And about halfway through camp, I saw Charlie just say, ‘You know what, I’m just going to go be me.’ And his level of play (went up). They are, to me, just going like this (raising two hands higher step by step) right now. And I see Gerry Bohanon now picking it up and learning all these great qualities from Jalan in terms of preparation. I feel so good about that position that I think it would be a disservice to any of them, really to any position, to say ‘Hey, you have a spot.’ The kids use the word spot to me a lot, like, ‘Coach, what about my spot?’ Like, if you’re not writing great articles (pointing to John Werner, Waco Trib), I’m sure at some point they’re going to take your spot. If I’m not winning, they’re going to take my spot. That’s not the way life works. I want to give kids every opportunity. Now, Week 2, Week 3, it changes. Now you’ve shown me. But, who’s going to prepare this week with classes, finals and tutoring sessions, who’s going to prepare at a high level at every position?

I want to say this one more time, that quarterback play has been really, really exciting. And I kind of don’t want to see it stop. I don’t want to see someone catch their breath and go, ‘Oh, I got the spot.’ Literally, I don’t care if I have to alternate them every play, if they’re going to keep doing this then we’ll do it. I’m not really going to do that, but I want to see them keep pushing each other, because they’re really playing well.

**On both QB’s being worthy of playing throughout the season …**“I think both are certainly deserving to play. These are the kinds of things that keep me up at night. At the end of the day I always want to be fair to everybody. But as we all know, life isn’t fair, and competition isn’t fair.”

**On similarities between the QB competition last year and this year …**“I certainly can see why people would think there would be similarities when an older guy comes in. Charlie has played for us and Zach had played. I’ve seen Charlie play and I have seen the things that he can do. Both Charlie and Jalen are playing well. For me to say somebody is starting this week might make them feel good, but it won’t give us the best week. At my previous stop I had one guy for four years. It’s not like I go back and forth on these things a lot, but if I have two guys playing well that doesn’t mean that only one will get to play.”

**On the mindset of the locker room coming into Saturday’s game …
“**I think these guys are extremely excited to go out and play somebody. I think we are tired of hitting each other. We have been hard on each other. Coaches on players, players on coaches, players on players and coaches on coaches. It will be good to play another team. Some of our guys know some of ACU’s guys and that is another thing our guys are looking forward to. I just want us to come out and play with an edge.”

**On progression of freshmen from spring …**“The true freshmen have all improved significantly. I think a lot of that has to do with our juniors and seniors really challenged the younger guys to push themselves to get better. We are trying to make this a team that isn’t led by the coaches and I thought we had a lot of seniors step up to the challenge. We have a bunch of young guys who are ready to go and can play now.

**On players having a better understanding of why you do certain things …**“I think when you know why you are doing something you can commit to it. When you understand something, you are more willing to just do it and not ask questions. Player driven teams are better than coach driven teams. We are also that much more prepared when we practice because we understand what is going on. I can show these guys plenty of examples of other teams grinding and working hard to get better. Now that they understand the “why” I think we are that much better prepared.”

**On the depth chart …**

Marcus Jones has had an amazing camp. Here’s a guy, sometimes we label guys as walk-ons, my kid that was playing for the Arizona Cardinals as a first-round draft pick made $13 million that year as a walk-on. You know I called him a walk-on when he walked across stage. So many times, we label someone a walk-on based upon something that happened to them when they were 17 or 18. Marcus Jones is a starter for us when we go to four-wide, so he will go and he’ll play a ton at wide out. He is a guy that runs 4.38 at 6’1 and has a 4.0 GPA and he is something beyond me. He is trying to decide where he is going to graduate school now and I mean he is just here in everything he does. And he allows our receivers to focus at a high level because he will do anything, he will block, he will play, but he is also a very good player. I’m not one of those guys that makes a video and says hey look we put a walk-on on a scholarship, but we put him on scholarship and he said “Thank you, coach” and came back the next day and started working. He is just an awesome guy. He got a ton of votes for single digits and I mean he is everything we want in the program. He is a great student, great worker, fast, fast, fast.

**On status of injured players …**Harrison (Hand) is full go. He is always practicing, he had a pulled a muscle in the summer and has justbeen slow to comeback. So, we have had a lot of other guys practicing at camp so they are justahead of him, but Harrison will play. I mean, he is in the mix. I’ll tell you what to tell you about a young man that’s really grown up over a course of a year. He is on scout team and he is out there giving a great look and then we rolled him over to get him into the two-deep, so he will play a lot of football this season.

Clay (Johnston) and Jake (Fruhmorgen) should be available this week, but it just depends on how practice goes this week. Jake was standing there the third day and a guy tripped into his leg, but he is moving around, and he and Clay will practice today.

**On having a relatively healthy team …**Yeah, well we still have some positions because of some of those suspensions and injuries,like defensive end is a real worry for me, we are down some bodies in that position. We are not fully, completely healthy, but I think the biggest thing is the adversity of last year in terms of the injuries. I know a lot of guys can play football. Now, you take a guy like Chad Kelly who might go out and start this game, well he can go out and play against TCU this year, you know he has performed at that level. Or James Lynch, who I showed the team, last year against Liberty was on the scout team, he is playing scout team defense with tackle, and then he ends the season as a Freshman All-American. Charlie is the scout team quarterback and ends the season as Big 12 Newcomer of the Year. This year all that adversity, injures that have happened, all those guys that played like Marques Jones now they can hopefully enter this game much more confidently that they have played and have been out there. We are not full strength in terms of our roster right now because of the suspensions and injuries. We will never really there, but I think as the season goes on and we get to game to 4, 5 and 6 and those are guys are coming back and hitting their strides and these guys that have been grinding all camp hopefully will hit their strides. Hopefully we will have a really strong team.

**On ACU …**Well I mean, first of all I know the coach is a winner, you win three national championships youknow what you are doing. They went 2-10 last season, that’s what I went my first year at Temple**,** and after last year I get that. But you saw a team that competed, you saw a team that was down atSam Houston at the half and came back and almost won the game. You saw a team that went toColorado State and was down and came back and fought, so you see that he’s got players and talent,you see a team that signed 24 guys and 15 are transfers, so there are guys that played at Cal, thereare guys that played at Fresno State, there are guys that played at Texas Tech. They knowwhat it is like, there were 27th in the country in passing offense, so they can throw the ballaround. DJ Fuller missed last year and he was their best receiver two years ago, he is back. Theywere 15th in turnovers, they don’t turn the ball over. You are looking at a really good passing offense, a team that likes to run the ball but areally good passing offense. On defense you are looking at one of the top passing defenses in thecountry and Treman Jackson, their defensive coordinator, they go in and out of man to man andthey give you so many different looks. One side of our line has played a lot football SamTecklenburg, Blake Blakemar and Patrick Lawrence. I feel really confident they are going tohandle all of those looks or at least communicate. You know, Christian (Beard) playing for the first time,Xavier Newman coming back from injury, (Josh) Malin and those guys haven’t played as much, and soit’s just about us getting on the same page. I think the thing that surprised us last year is thoseteams like UTSA and we didn’t win enough. These guys are going to come out and play man toman. I know a lot of ACU, as much as I can know, but first week opponent is alwayshard, they might have changed things in the offseason, and we have to have a lot of confidence in the things we have done in this camp. It just comes down to who plays the best, which coach coaches better. I know they will come to play, and they are excited to come and play. I know our guys are excited to come play as well, hopefully we will find a way to get it done.

**On using last year's opener as motivation ...**"I don't think I have to mention it to them. I think they remember that pretty well. I've mentioned last year's opener, but I don't like to mention it on game week. I'd rather mention it in the middle of the winter when we're out there at 5:45 in the morning and saying 'Why are we here?' Well, let's remember why we're here. I think all of our guys know that nothing that happened last year affects this week, but we should have learned from things that happened last year. I always say that if you don't learn from it, you're a fool. I think we've learned from it. Again, it comes down to humble confidence. You're going to prepare, prepare, prepare and then have the confidence to go play. I'm hopeful that our guys will do that and will play their best game."

**On the running game...**"I'm anxious to see it. Obviously, we were really unable to run the football last year and we've tried to improve that. We're not really doing anything different, but we are trying to be much better at what we're doing. I like our backs. I mentioned Abram Smith, he's really one of the surprises from camp and not a surprise in a bad way, coming off his second ACL (tear), he's had a really, really good camp. And JaMycal (Hasty), and (John) Lovett and (Trestan) Ebner and Craig Williams and Kyle Boyd at fullback when we use one, I've been pleased, but you never really know in the run game until you go play somebody else. You know you've got to go against yourselves every day so for us we get used to going against a 4-3, cover eight, we’ve gone against it every day and all of a sudden you get to a game and it's completely different. It comes down to do you have the poise and also the acumen to handle the things that are thrown at you. I think Shawn Bell has done a really nice job with the offensive line and Josh Cocker has done a really nice job with the offensive line. Joey McGuire has done a great job with the tight ends and as some of you know we lost Jamie Jacobs, the doctor just recommended that he not play anymore, just over time with his back. Christoph Henle and some of those guys who are playing for us, we're going to start a true freshman at tight end. And he's got to go play well. We'll see on gameday, I prefer to run the ball well, that makes me feel good so I'm hopeful that we can do it."

**On Ross Matiscik playing linebacker and long snapping...**"It's not ideal (for him to long snap) but I think a couple things, when we watch Ross, he runs down and knocks the ball out. We want to create more turnovers and he makes turnovers. Every time we did a drill and we put Ross in, he was one of the best guys on the team at it. So going into this year I said to Ross 'Would you consider playing defense too?' and is there an inherent risk to him snapping, absolutely. But there's also a risk to our quarterback running the football. Football is a game of injuries. But he just has a natural feel for how to play the game. He came here as a linebacker and since day one he's been that kind of a guy. He's a playmaking type of player. The things you see on special teams you also see on defense, and I want him to have a long NFL future, that will be as a snapper but the more he can do, the more he can do. I'm not surprised at all, he's been one of those guys we've said 'we should' and finally we said 'why don't we?' And he was willing to do it, which is really cool. There might be some bumps along the way, but I think in the long run he's going to make our defense a lot better."

**On players suspended for disciplinary issues...**"They have nothing lingering, for some of these guys it was last spring. Just discipline issues, like hey this is carrying over. For some of these guys, it's the summer but they're all good. I mean, Greg (Roberts) went to media day with us. Greg has been a tremendous leader for us, he's a great, great, great person. Ashton Logan has had a great camp. BJ (Thompson) is as solid a human as there is. But sometimes when we're 18, 19, 20, 21 we do things and there's repercussions. Doesn't mean we don't love them, those guys are out there doing everything they can. There's standards that we all have to live up to and they've lived up to a lot of them, but they made a mistake and we move on."

**On the new redshirt rule...**"I think it's different for every person. That's a great question. Some guys we might say they're not going to play much the rest of the year so if we ever have a chance to get him in a game we will. Some guys we're saying hey, this guy might be our backup but it's in his best interest if we can redshirt him so we'll play him as needed and see how things go. It's really a case-by-case basis. We had a long meeting where we talked about each guy and 'what are we going to do with him?' As with anything, that get changed after one week. It's a case-by-case basis, we're just trying to be really intentional about it. When you start affecting someone's life, you have to think about it. There are guys like Jared Atkinson not being here in the spring dealing with some things, I thought maybe he'd redshirt. It'd be great for Jared to redshirt this year and help him go finish his degree quicker, but he's had a great camp. He's played himself into not redshirting now. We'll try to be intentional about it."

**On Kalon Barnes playing defense...**"He's looked fantastic. It kind of pains me because I really wanted him to play offense and Fran (Brown) wanted him to play corner so I said he could do both. He's just so fast. I think the biggest thing about Kalon is how competitive he is. He just loves to play and get coached and he brings world class speed. I'm hopeful that he'll play a lot for us at corner, especially as we get into some of these four-wide teams, he can go be our dime. He'll also help us on offense, he'll return kicks. There's some freshmen, Josh Fleeks, as those guys get comfortable, I think you'll see our freshmen's roles over the course of the season really increase as they get more and more confident with what they're doing."