Baylor Football Head Coach Matt Rhule
Weekly Press Conference
September 10, 2018

**Opening statement …**“Proud of our football team. Went down to San Antonio, played a tough UTSA football team and found a way to come away with a win. Thought it was a tremendous crowd in San Antonio. I thought Baylor people were there, it was great to play in front of our fans. I also thought the Roadrunner faithful were there, they were in force. As we move our team forward, as we continue to try to grow them and learn how to handle new experiences, as we go on the road in the future, that crowd noise, that decibel level will be very good for us as we try to have poise in the noise moving forward.

Excited to get back. Came away from that game with really no injuries. Bravvion (Roy) went down for a little bit and was able to come right back. Excited to get back this week and play a really good Duke team, a team that’s getting votes in the top 25. Coached by a guy who I’ve been on record as saying is really a hero of mine in coaching in David Cutcliffe. Went there last year, was a hard-fought game, they beat us soundly. And we’ve worked hard to get ourselves back in this position. We’ll look forward to playing them this Saturday. Another challenge for our guys, another opportunity for us to be at home.

Like anything else, we’re going to enjoy the win. We’ve enjoyed the win, but we know there’s a lot of things we have to improve on. Most importantly up front on the offensive line, we have to play significantly better against an outstanding Duke defensive line. I know there are going to be lots of story lines in this game, but to me the biggest one is they have an All-American, all-everything defensive end in Victor Dimukeje, who was a freshman last year who was special. He has two sacks, he’s got 11 pressures, dominant sacks, dominant pass rushes, and it will be a challenge for us, along with the rest of their defensive line. They’ve got sacks spread out across the board. They’re really athletic on defense. Linebackers are outstanding players. They lost (cornerback) Mark Gilbert, unfortunately, but they have a tremendous secondary. They’ll play us in man-to-man, they’ll play bump-and-run, they’ll get up in our faces. They do it to everybody, and it’s why no one has scored more than 30 points on them in over a year. I think they’ve had seven straight fourth-quarter shutouts, which is absolutely amazing. Northwestern scored on the first drive and then did not score again for 55 minutes. They are an outstanding defense, an outstanding red-zone defense and we’ll have to play significantly better up front to have a chance against this pass rush that we’re going to see, and we saw that last year. I think they had four or five sacks against us down the stretch, and we’ll have to be much improved.

Defensively, I know we’re working hard to correct some of those big plays that popped the other day. We’re getting better, we just need a little bit more in terms of discipline and gap-integrity and making sure that we don’t come out of our gap. As we move forward, offensively, defensively and special teams, we’ve been able to overcome a lot of self-inflicted mistakes. You certainly can’t do that against Duke. We can’t drop kickoffs, we can’t have crucial penalties on fourth-and-one. We’ve got to grow up as a football team, and they’re working hard to do that. I’m proud of our players. They’re learning as the games go, but this will be quite a test.

I think they’re one of five Power 5 teams to win a Power 5 road game this year. They’ve gone on the road and won a game in the Big Ten. That’s impressive, and now they’re getting ready to come down to Waco. They’ve lost a couple guys. I have the utmost respect for Daniel Jones as a quarterback, and I’m sad to see him hurt. I know he’ll be back. I know two things with a David Cutcliffe team, you’re going to get good quarterback play; and Quentin Harris is an outstanding dual-threat quarterback, we’ve played against him. We’re preparing for everybody and trying to make sure our team is as good as it can be.”

**On Duke quarterback Quentin Harris …**“He’s only attempted 15 passes, but he’s played. He came in against us last year. He’s a dual-threat guy, he can run it, he can throw it. He’s been their short-yardage, goal-line quarterback, run game. It introduces a whole other element to us now – Daniel could run, they ran him a ton in the red zone last year, ran him against us last year – but we’re going to have to handle the quarterback run game. When you have a quarterback who will run it, you gain a defender. It becomes 11-on-11 for the first time. It will be a challenge and it introduces a whole other set of variables that we probably hadn’t planned on working on this week.”

**On Charlie Brewer’s improvement …**“I think the competition has helped both quarterbacks. They’re both having to push without pressing. I think you could see a little different look in Charlie’s eyes this week. As I’ve said, sometimes when you’re going through things in life and what might feel like adversity ends up being the greatest thing that ever happened to you when you look back, and I think that’s true for both guys. Where early on, you press and you’re pushing, just name me the starter so I can relax, I think this week you saw Charlie have a different look in his eye all week. And really, the first game, Charlie took us right down the field. (Chris) Platt goes to the 1-yard line, we get a penalty. A couple drops. So, Jalan’s (McClendon) moving us. This game, Jalan comes in and he makes an unbelievable throw to (Denzel) Mims. A couple drops, a couple wrong routes, and now he’s sort of the victim of those things. I think both players are playing at a high level, both players are trying to get better, both players bring something a little different. Charlie is a little bit more move around in the pocket; Jalan gets the ball down the field a little bit farther. But, I think they’re both getting better, so we’ll continue to play both.”

**On struggles in the run game …**“I’ll always give credit to UTSA, because they lined up and stopped it, but it was just a lot of errors on our end. A lot of our guys just getting whupped. It’s one of the psychology of results, when you have success one week, you tend to not have as much success next week in the same area. UTSA goes to Arizona State last week, and our guys look at Arizona State (49-7). If you knew Arizona State was going to go out and whip Michigan State, who was a top-15 team, you might look at it a little bit differently. But, they came to play defense. Now, they put everyone in the box and there were some things open outside, but we still have to block the guy in front of us and get yards. We weren’t able to do that.

I do think the first two weeks have been good for us in that we’ve seen more defense than we’ll probably see all year. We’ve seen a ton of different looks and we’ve played with a bunch of different guys. We’ve played with three left tackles, we’ve played with two left guards. So hopefully we can continue to develop a little more consistency up front. If we’ve got to simplify, if we’ve got to do more, we’re trying to figure that out right now, but we’ve got to find a way to run the football. We can’t sit back there and throw it every play.”

**On the similarities and differences between Charlie Brewer and Jalan McClendon …**“I think their accuracy and ability to take care of the football. They handle duress. Jalan gets hit from behind and fumbles the football and he’s about to throw a touchdown. Last week Charlie had the tipped ball. Other than that, they are both taking care of the ball and both are accurate. We probably could have thrown for another 150 yards had we not had all the drops. We also had some receivers make some amazing catches.”

**On seeing that 10 different receivers have caught passes this year…**“It’s vital for our mental health. The guys know that they aren’t going to catch every ball. We track the catches and we also track the targets. A big thing for us this year is our ability to get the ball to the running backs and the tight ends. We have been doing a really good job of taking what the defense gives us.”

**On Jalen Hurd’s influence on getting receivers to block down field…**“I would say Jalen is setting the example and so is Chris Platt. Both of their blocking has been dominate. This game it wasn’t as great as the first because we were throwing the ball more. Mims had that long catch and Platt got called for holding. I did not say a word to Platt because he was blocking his tail off and had Mims gone inside instead of outside it might have been a touchdown.”

**On if the defense improved from week one to week two…**“I think in some ways we did. The biggest thing for us on defense is we still have a lot of guys making decisions. Our defense is based on precision and we just must do our job. We are just in that time in space where we are just missing our spots. We can’t play like that. Good teams will get us. Last year Oklahoma went up 20 on us and we were just guessing too much. We just have to do our job and if they out-physical us we just have to keep playing.”

**On how Clay Johnston played in his first game back…**“He played well. We tried to limit his reps. We didn’t want to get him overly tired. Chad Kelly got banged up during the week and Clay knows the defense and he plays free-minded and makes plays. He was flying around on one screen and he made an elite play. Plays like that come from experience. He can do his job and still can make the play. Clay was special last year during the Duke game and I know with their scheme they like to take away the middle linebacker.”

**On Coach Cutcliffe’s player development…**“When I’m around Coach Cutcliffe I feel like I’m learning because to me he is a teacher. A lot of the guys I’ve been around are teachers. Tom Coughlin is a tremendous teacher. When I was at UCLA I had the opportunity to spend some time with John Wooden. He is a teacher. Coach Cutcliffe is a teacher. His QB’s must be well prepared for the NFL. They call the game at the line of scrimmage and that makes it hard for us because they are going to study what we do and be able to make change at the line of scrimmage. On a personal note I think he is a gentleman coach and a great person.”

**On James Lynch...**"He's playing at an extremely high level. He's got two sacks right now. I think the biggest thing is he's a big, athletic man. He uses his athleticism along with technique, extremely coachable, he plays hard. Because of some of our issues, he's had to play outside and he doesn't make excuses, just gets it done. He's really a special, special player and a great teammate."

**On returning to McLane Stadium after playing at the Alamodome...**"I think that's one of the advantages of playing at home is you hope it's really loud and really difficult for the other team to operate. We have a great crowd and we're hopeful that they'll be out there in full force. The Baylor Line will be there and it will be loud and exciting."

**On Greg Roberts...**"He played well. He got a chance to go out there in the second half and play inside and outside. The thing about Greg is he's aggressive, he gets off the ball, he plays hard and it was good to get him back out there. I was proud of him. He took his suspension, practiced with the scout team and helped try to get our (offensive) tackles ready and gave them a lot of work. He didn't take this as a time to pout or a time not to be a leader. He took it as a time to get better and he played well when he was out there."

**On getting players back from injury and suspension...**"We should have a couple guys coming back and some guys off of injury as well. I think one of the big ones is we hopefully get Tyrone Hunt back soon. That will help our D-Line. And then Johncarlo (Valentin), we were going to put him in at the end of the game, but decided to wait. This week, Johncarlo will be full-go. (Jake) Fruhmorgen has now played a week, he's got some more confidence in his knee that he can do it. Hopefully we can be a little more stout inside and add some more bodies and see what happens."

**On the competition stepping up leading to this week's game against Duke...**"I think having a Power 5 non-conference home game is awesome. It's good for our program. We've played two good football teams that gave us a good game, put us in unique situations and gave us a lot of things to prepare for, have exposed our issues and we're working hard to fix those issues. We know Duke is going to come in with a great gameplan, they're a great team, but we can't control them, we can only control us. We're going to focus really hard this week on making sure we're the best we can be, playing hard and playing for 60 minutes. I do think it's good before we start conference play to have a Power 5 home game and see where we really truly are."

**On the group of wide receivers...**"I'd say they're really unselfish. There's some guys waiting their turns right now. Josh Fleeks is going to get out there one of these days and I think everyone is going to say wow. Tony Nicholson is catching punts right now and Pooh Stricklin, these guys are waiting their turn. I think they all push each other, they all practice hard. Tyquan (Thornton) is making some plays here and there, big shallow cross from Tyquan (last week). But they all seem to support each other, they all seem to push each other. That allows us to be really aggressive because you know they're going to go lay it on the line for each other and also block for their running backs. I like the group. I think Frisman Jackson has done a tremendous job of really making that a unit as opposed to a group of players."

**On the onside kick...**"That was Mike Siravo and Fran Brown, that was their call. We had that in, but this week we thought we saw on film that we would have it. Coach (Joey) McGuire kept telling me we were going to score the first drive and then onside kick it, but I said let's just play defense. Finally, we saw we had it and I said 'alright, let's do it' and then do the reverse pass. I think the biggest thing is I have a lot of confidence in our defense. We were keeping it pretty wide open, kept talking to Phil (Snow) and he said 'do it, put them away.' I also have a lot of confidence in Drew Galitz and Jalen Pitre and Zeke Brown. They're the guys who came up with the ball. Just a lot of confidence in our guys to go get it and if we didn't, we'd play defense."

**On Connor Martin...**"He's kicking the heck out of it. (Chris) Lutzel is snapping great and (Drew) Galitz is holding. In camp, we were kind of up and down, but we have a lot of confidence in him. He's not making short field goals, he's making them when the ball is out past the 25 yard-line. I like what our specialists are doing."