Baylor Football Head Coach Matt Rhule
Weekly Press Conference
October 6, 2018

***Opening Statement***
“ Appreciate everybody being here and covering us today. Obviously, very happy for our players. I thought they played a good game on Saturday versus a tough, hard-nosed, veteran Kansas State team. Lot of credit to them, I thought Kansas State did a really nice job keeping us out of the end zone in the red zone. They did a really nice job, obviously, of running the football. And proud of our guys that we were able to make a couple plays late and find a way to win the game. Happy for Connor Martin that he went out and made the game-winning kick. And as I said to our team, from the sideline to the locker room to the crowd, I thought it was a total team win. And I thought that’s probably what our team needed was that kind of game.

We’ll turn our attention now to the University of Texas. They were obviously extremely impressive on Saturday beating the University of Oklahoma. I think that’s three top-25 wins for them They’re playing really, really well right now, and we have a lot of respect for them and their players and their coaching staff and know it will be a great opportunity for us. So, we’re excited, we’re about ready to get to work.”

***On the importance of winning a close game….***

“I think a couple things. No. 1, when you get into conference play, that’s what a lot of your games are going to be like. They’re going to come down to the end. And usually, to me, winning games in the fourth quarter comes down to maturity, comes down to confidence, it comes down to trust. Trusting in yourself, trusting in the guys around you. And I just didn’t sense any panic. I sensed a team that was just determined to find a way to win the game and kept coming back and kept battling. They scored the last touchdown, and it could have been a depressing moment because I kind of think we had it. And they kick it off and they tackle us at the 14-yard line. So, to have 86 yards in front of you, that can be daunting. But we just did it piece by piece. At the end, to get down there, to put the game not just in Connor’s hands, but the whole PAT/field goal team, I thought that was really important. A tremendous experience for us as we move forward. We played a lot of young kids in that game. We started two true freshmen in the secondary, and I believe it was both of their first starts. Christian Morgan stepped up and had an interception. Kalon Barnes made some unbelievable plays. We wear those GPS units, and Coach Althoff told me that (Barnes) recorded like a 22.9, which was the third-fastest of all time here.

I just think that was good. But, I think the biggest thing is our guys enjoyed the battle. If you play the game looking at the scoreboard, you end up getting tight. And I thought our guys really enjoyed the moment. It was fun on the sidelines and it was fun in the stadium. I thought the crowd at the end was awesome. So, it was a great experience for our players, and I was happy for them.”

***On the defense giving up big plays…***

“We have to play better. It’s never just one thing, and that’s coaching talk. One or two of them, we’re slanting the whole line, and a couple guys go the wrong way, it opens up a huge gap and it’s a touchdown. I think we have to play a little bit better on our second and third levels. I think our d-line is getting off and playing aggressively and playing violently and getting off blocks. I think we had like four or five sacks in the game, we created turnovers. So, we’re doing some things better than we have. It’s just those devastating . . . the runs are what kill you. Against Oklahoma, they had some runs in the fourth quarter, but I think we had them at like 87 yards in the middle of the third quarter rushing. It was the pass that hurt us. We came into this game, and DT (Derrek Thomas) and Harrison (Hand) weren’t at 100 percent, Grayland (Arnold) is out. Raleigh (Texada) and Kalon practiced really well, so we went ahead and started them. Versus a couple veteran receivers, you’re expecting that to be the issue, and those guys held up great. It was the run that got us.

We just have to play better. As dumb as that may sound, as simple as that might sound, guys have to get off blocks and make some plays. We’re not really doing that at the highest level right now. We blitzed the run, we man-blitzed the run, we did a bunch of different things. But it’s not any one guy, it’s not any one thing. And to me, I think it can be corrected, and it needs to be corrected moving forward. And I thought Kansas State, a lot of credit to them, they came out with a run in the second half that they hadn’t really used in the first half, and it just kind of schematically bothered us. Our guys never really adjusted. We tried to adjust on the sidelines, and we never really did. And I thought Barnes played really well. The game was over, our kids were celebrating, he was the first guy I walked over to and said, ‘Boy, I tell you what, that was an outstanding performance!’ And I don’t want to take anything away from him. I thought he was really special.”

***On the impact of transfers…***

“When I was at Temple, I didn’t take a ton of transfers, it had to be somebody I had a relationship with. When we got here, because of the scholarship situation that we were in, I thought taking a couple guys made a lot of sense. So, I think it’s just a little bit different. When you come out of high school, guys are thinking about a lot of different things, like what I want to study. Some guys want to know the helmet combinations. There’s a lot of different things that go into high school recruiting. When you’ve gone somewhere and it didn’t work out, and you’re looking for a second place, it’s usually a little different conversation. It’s how do I fit, where do I belong. We have to feel good about what your reasons were for leaving. It’s always a unique situation. But, those guys have helped us a ton.

Jake Fruhmorgen, I’m waiting for him to get healthy, and I think we’re really going to see him start to shine. You look at Jalen Hurd, I think his impact, I think everyone’s starting to see it. (James Lockhart), he’s a guy that came when we first got here and came at midyear to kind of fill the class that had left the year before. And he’s playing good football now. Christian Beard came here and walked on and earned a scholarship. He started the first couple games when he was 100 percent, and he’s done a great job for us. So, there’s a lot of impact from a lot of those guys. And then (Jalan) McClendon, he’s a drop pass or two away from playing a lot more. He had his chance, and some guys didn’t make some plays. But, he’s been an amazing teammate and he’s going to go play pro football. And hopefully this place has helped him along the way. Those guys have been great for us. It’s a unique roster situation. People always ask me all these things about what we’ve done roster-wise. It’s been different. You don’t see that very often. So, those guys really helped us make sure that we had enough older guys to go along with all the young kids we brought in.”

***On the balance between psychology and mechanics when a kicker is struggling…***

“It’s been a couple weeks now for him. He missed an extra point against Oklahoma, he missed I think a kick the week before. And really, a lot of times, just like with my golf swing, your psychology affects your technique and affects your mechanics. Connor’s an elite kicker. At one point, we were putting out graphics, he was 5-for-5. He’s an outstanding kicker. There’s been times where he hasn’t really attacked the ball and got his plant foot down and finished through the ball, where he’s starting to kind of try to push it and hope that it goes on. I don’t think it’s that simple. Like at halftime, he needed to get a little bit out. You can say what you want, but that’s affecting you. I come in on Sundays and I meet with a lot of players. There’s a lot of things going on in a lot of players’ brains and hearts, and they all want so badly to do well and they all want so badly to not let their teammates down. When you do, you start to put a ton of pressure on yourself. I think at halftime, he just had to settle down. And you know what, I kept putting him out there kicking 50-yarders. It wasn’t like I was giving him layups. I just wanted him to know . . . I tried one time being nice; I tried one time saying do you want me to put somebody else in; I tried one time saying you can do it. But I think at the end of the day, what was really cool was that it was him. He had the look in his eye when he went out to kick that last field goal like I’m knocking this through. He kind of ran out there with purpose. That’s something he did. There was a kicker in the NFL this week that missed five or something like that. Mason Crosby, who’s outstanding. We’re all going to have sort of those days. It’s about having enough confidence and trust in yourself to go back to the process of what do I do. And I thought he did that when it mattered most.”

***On the running back position, Jonathan Lovett’s situation and Sqwirl…***

“Lovett, he’ll be good to go this week. We thought he would be ready for the game, and at the last minute the doctors felt like he hadn’t fulfilled everything. That’s what’s great about having medical professionals handling concussions nowadays is they tell you when someone’s ready.

Sqwirl, I think it’s a week-to-week thing. What a burst he gave us. Not just on that last run but on the first run. We’ll try to use him in spots and kind of make a decision as we go of, are we going to use his year up or just try to play four games? We have a lot of guys playing running back. You run for 260 yards, you only have one 100-yard tailback. Ebner did his thing. Jalen Hurd comes over, kind of in the big packages, and does his thing. And it was a great play by Sqwirl. Really one of the best moments for me in that game was just seeing all the older guys celebrate with Sqwirl. They deeply, deeply respect him. He’s our scout-team tailback, he and Abram (Smith), and they hit him. And Sqwirl just gets right back up and keeps playing. So, for him to have a chance in the game, I thought was really cool for our team. I’m not really sure what his role will be this week, but we’re hopeful we can find him something to do.”

***On getting results this week, what it does to a locker room…***

“I told them all the time in camp how special I think they are. I said, you’re believing in what we’re doing, you’re doing it day-in and day-out, without any evidence. It’s just faith right now. And when you start to win, you’ll say it’s all worth it, it will all make sense. But when you’re doing it and you’re not winning, it’s completely different.

At the end of the game, we were all up at the 50-yard line, because we say a prayer after the game. Because we started the game by saying, just remember all the things we’ve done on the field all summer – pushing plates, 6 a.m. in the winter – was it all worth it? And they said absolutely. When you can finally say that, instead of saying hey someday it’s going to be worth it, when you can say was all the work worth it? Yes, it was. Great. That’s when the guys really start to believe in the process that you’re doing. And everyone has a process, everyone has a way that they run their program. When they start to see the results, both team-wise in terms of wins; when they start to see it personally when they realize they’re playing better; and when they start to see guys go off to the NFL and come back and say, hey, we’re prepared, that to me takes the program to the next level. We’re certainly a work in progress. But, you hope they believe you more. When I go in today and say, hey guys, we’re doing this well, this well, this well, we have to fix this, now at least they know, Hey, Coach told us the truth when we were 0-6, 0-7, hopefully he’s telling us the truth now that we’ve won four games.”

***On the kicker situation…***
“I think it is such a lonely position. If I’m a corner and I get beat deep for a forty yard catch I get to line up again on the next play and get it out of my system. If I’m a kicker I have to wait until my next opportunity to kick. In our situation its tough because Drew Galitz kicks off for us, so Connor [Martin] doesn’t have a chance to go out and get it out of his system. I think Connor showed us how mentally tough he is and really stepped up when his team needed him.”

**On what you see from Sam Ehlinger…**“Last year we didn’t have a chance to play against Sam. We played against Shane and I thought he was outstanding in that game. He is a great quarterback as well. Sam is a great competitor. He brings a lot to the table in the terms of his ability to run the football. We played Coach Herman and that staff when they were at Houston and Greg Ward was just a difference maker with his ability to run the football. Watching Sam, he can run the ball if they have numbers. He can run zone read and scramble and he is extremely accurate, and he takes advantage of his big receivers. He is playing very well and is in a system that allows him to excel.”

***On Kalon Barnes play at cornerback…***
“He runs a ten flat hundred-meter dash. It is easy to stick a guy out at corner who runs that fast. He played receiver the first three weeks of camp and I hope that we get him back on that side of the ball. But with our group of receivers right now we want him to play both ways but right now he has earned his spot to start on defense.”

***On the success on third down…***
“I think we are leading the Big 12 in first downs. The last two games we have had a lot of yards but have not had a lot of explosive plays. People are trying to take away our deep passes and they are making us execute. We had 30 first downs against Oklahoma and 38 against Kansas State on Saturday. That is a credit to our receivers making plays and helping us move the chains. We aren’t doing a great job of protecting the quarterback on third down. Putting Jalen [Hurd] in the backfield in short yardage has really helped us out.”

***On any extra hype from fans and media from playing Texas the week after they play OU…***
“Texas is a really good team. Our guys have to come out and play very confident. Texas is playing well. They have three top 25 wins. They are a team that is clicking on all cylinders. For us we have to completely focus on ourselves. We will make sure our guys are ready and confident.”

***On the status of Grayland Arnold and Verkedric Vaughns…***
“Verkedric was dressed out and available. He has a lingering issue that plagues him at times. The same can be said for Derrek Thomas and Harrison Hand. They were available Saturday as needed. As for Grayland Arnold and Xavier Newman they will be down a little longer.”

***On the play of Jairon McVea…***“Last week I don’t think he saw the field other than special teams. But he has worked hard all season and I’m glad we were able to get him out there and he was able to make a play. He is a tremendous teammate. He works hard on specials teams and scout teams. He is a 4.38 speed guy and I’m really glad he was out there and made a play.”