Baylor Football Head Coach Matt Rhule
Weekly Press Conference
August 26, 2019

***Opening Statement***
“All right, well welcome everybody. Glad to have you guys here. Obviously very excited to get started with the season. We welcome Stephen F. Austin here and I'm excited to get the games going. I thought we had a great preseason. Guys worked really hard. I think we've built a solid team around some great leaders and I think we're at the point now where we have to go out there and compete and see what kind of football team we have.”

***On what he’s liked most from his team during training camp….***
“They've been tough. They've worked really hard, they've been competitive and we've eliminated distractions. There has been tremendous competition. And I think the biggest thing is we're trying to add in discipline on the field. And I think I've seen that in a lot of different areas. That first game is always hard. You don't really know what you have until you get out there. You saw that there and I think with Miami and Florida the other night with penalties, sacks, turnovers, all those things, the things that get you beat. I would be sad if that happened. I think that we look like a team that's not going to beat ourselves, but we have to actually go out there and do it. And I think the biggest thing is just maturity. You know, when I stand up in front of the team and talk and when guys go in their position rooms and talk, you have a bunch of veteran players that are bought into not just what we're doing but how we're doing it and that that's important to me.

***On Prince Pines and Blake Bedier earning starting roles per the depth chart…***Yes, as of today they have earned those starting roles through what they did in camp. We've had some great competition at those spots and Casey Phillips was out for a couple of days, so that'll allowed Bedier to have some more reps. Those depth charts are as of today, to be quite honest. We'll compete Tuesday, we'll compete Wednesday, but I feel good about where the offensive line is at. I think Prince Pines is a fascinating story. He missed all last season and was able to come out this year and so far he's been really, really consistent. Now he needs to go play. And when you play you see some mistakes, but you fix them. But you know, guys like Xavier Newman, Jason Moore, we feel like we were 10 or 11 guys deep on the offensive line. And that's certainly, the first time we’ve felt that way.

***On coming out of camp healthy…***We came out of camp healthy. Some of the young guys have some things, but for our vets, we came out of camp really, really healthy. And I would expect that all our guys will be ready to play this week.

***How have you seen a change from your first camp where you were instilling a mindset to now…***“It’s night and day. It really started in the middle of last season. We went through the bowl game, went through the spring and, you know, good teams make the coach stop practice early. Sometimes as a coach you will be like, you know what, that's enough. And I've done that several times. That’s really the seniors, the older guys. Some of our younger guys still need a lot of reps, but for our vets, we still need a lot of work, don't get me wrong, but I think that they try to attack practice and somewhere along the way you stop thinking it is a practice. You start thinking of it as a competition. And somewhere along the way you stop thinking about getting through it and you start having real deliberate practice where you're trying to improve on something. And so that's just maturity.When you’re young, the coach tells you need to work on something, you take it personal. And when you're a vet, you're telling the coach what you need to work on. And so I've seen that. The biggest thing is we have guys like, I'll use his name again, Grayland Arnold being the best that I can think of right now, who are vocal about the things. We watch the tape from practice as a team and he’s vocal about the things that we should have done better. And when your best players are doing that, then everyone else says, wow, that's how you get good. And then the next thing you know, it carries over. And so I think that they attack practice and that makes my life a lot easier.”

***On the selections for single digits…***“I think they got it right. And I think there were a couple more guys that were right there in the voting and sometimes when it's that close, within a couple of votes, as the head coach I'll say we'll go with this guy, maybe because he's a little bit older. But I thought they got it right and I thought there were another five or six guys that were deserving. No one exemplifies a single digit to me more than RJ Sneed with what he's done this camp and what he’s done this off season and while he's not in one yet, he will be. There’s also Terrel Bernard and Charlie Brewer. So, there's lots of guys like that. James Lynch, there's another guy that's played through more discomfort, more ankle sprains and broken fingers. And so that's just to name a few. I am pleased with how they got it. The great thing for me is our young guys that are on the team now have a great example of what a single digit means. There have been some really great single digits the last two years. I expect us to be nine strong the entire season where those nine guys are showing up game in and game out.

***Six of those single-digit guys are on the defensive side, does that show where this team is heading…
‘***Well we have a lot of veterans on defense, you know, so now our issue is going to be when the young guys go out there to play, are they going to play at the same standard? Because of the offensive line not being able to do it, you should have more on defense. Trestan Ebner is another guy that could have one, the guys voted a ton for him. These guys, Chris Miller, Henry Black, the Jameson Houston, all those guys have played a lot of football for us, and now it's time for us to go out and play great defense and we feel like we have the talent to do it. We feel like we have the scheme to do it, we feel like we have the toughness to do it, but we have to go do it. And then when the two’s go in, the young guys go in, they need to play to the same standards. So, I'm excited to see them play and see how they handle things. And I think this'll be a challenge in that the offense we're going to face is different than what we do. And so it's one thing when you get good at going against your offense all the time, but now you're going against Stephen F. Austin’s offense and pistol and outside zone and things that we don't really do. Can we adjust on a game week and go play great defense against something that we're not real comfortable going against. That'll be a real challenge.

***What’s the mindset of the players as camp is over and it is game week…***
Well, during training camp you're just grinding and what we asked them to do is the process, just to control the things that you can control and try to get one percent better every day. Well now you're in game week, right? And so now the shift, the focus has to change and from getting one percent better every day to getting yourself prepared to play on the Saturday. And to me every single thing that you do this week, from what you eat, to what you sleep, to, how much you study the game plan either helps you or hurts you. I can't make that decision for the guys, I can only control like two to four hours a day. And you know, the other 20 to 22 hours a day is where great happens. That's where if you want to go be great, then get yourself extra work done on your own and during those other hours make the right decision to get enough sleep, eat the right thing and hydrate. That’s where maturity comes in. So I expect us to try to go out there and play our best football game. I expect us to try to put beautiful things on tape. You know, we never want to look at the scoreboard when we win or when we lose, the scoreboard just tells you if you won the game or not. But when we turn the tape on we want to feel really proud about the standard of performance that we have, how physical we play, how hard we play, how disciplined we are. Do we look like a team that cares about each other and loves each other? Is there a difference between the one and the two? There should be no difference in our standard of performance. And so that's the pressure. People think that’s pressure, no, it’s all about preparation. If we prepare our tails off all week, then we can go in the game and play with humble confidence and fly around. And so it's a shift and that's why if you walk in our building, there are 1-0 signs up, everything should feel different. You know, I want to make sure that game week feels like game week because camp is over now. Now it's time to go put it on tape for everyone to see. I would expect us to prepare well all week and then hopefully go play with confidence.”

***On John Mayers winning kicking competition…***“If we played right now he'd kick and Noah [Rauschenberg] has also done a great job. He's got a big, big, big, big leg. John has maybe been just a little bit more consistent and some of that comes down to operation time, he's getting the ball out a little bit more consistently. I think they're both guys that are above the line as kickers and Noah, I think will certainly kick off for us, he's got a big, big leg and Isaac [Power] will punt. So, three young specialists and that was a real area of concern, but coming into the season I think that they've all had a really good training camp. We'll step forward like that.”

***On if anything different was done to keep everyone healthy during training camp…*** “No, we practiced harder than we did last camp. It was the same schedule, the guys just practiced harder. They're just bigger, stronger. You know, guys that once played at 209 are now 230. Rob Saulin was 250 as a freshman, but he’s not 305, 310. So, they're just bigger, faster, stronger. They understand the process and a lot of not getting hurt is trying to attack contact and dominating contact. And so a lot of our injuries happen over the years when you're kind of not ready for contact and you get knocked back and something bad happens. And so I think you see a lot of guys now understand, hey, we're going to dominate contact and that's been really good for us.”

***On how satisfying is it the players that have single digits now are guys that once thought about leaving your program…***“That’s certainly satisfying because it shows that number one, the process works. Number two, it means that they hung in there. You know, like I say all the time, people always talk about how all young people do this or that, all these negative things. People talk about the transfer portal. Most kids I know are pretty resilient and the kids in this program are dang resilient. If you're one of the seniors, I'm probably your third head coach and you've lived through 1-11, you've lived through two 7-6 seasons and you didn't let those things define you and you know that the best is always yet to come. I'm proud of those guys. They’ve hung in there with us. We've hung in there with them too and it feels like a nice partnership. I loved last year's senior class and this year’s senior class is shaping up to be a great one. We’ve done some special things this summer, some retreats, a trip to Philadelphia, all kinds of things to get us closer. And I think the coaching staff and the senior class is walking into this season locked in together and I would be surprise if that changed.

***On what to expect from SFA…***“When you are preparing for your first opponent and it's a coaching change, which also happened last year, it’s really kind of twice the work. You have to watch SFA to see the personnel and then you have to watch Texas A&M Commerce to see the schemes. Coach Carthel is a loyal guy and he brought staff with him. And so what I'll say is they're unbelievably well coached. I mean they are well put together and they know exactly what they're doing and they present all kinds of problems both offensively, defensively and special teams wise. And that's why, you know, he was able to do what he did at Commerce, took over a program that hadn't won and he had him the national championship game. And I knew that because I went and worked his camp and you know, I've worked a lot of camps over the years and a lot of coaches kind of roll the balls out and they're looking for the top three or four recruits.But Coach Carthel and his staff, they are grinders, like they're, they're registering the kids, feeding the kids, timing the forties, running the drills. I mean, they are absolute grinders and there's no doubt how successful he's going to be. I tried to convince him to come work for us a couple years ago and I've talked to him, I think he's just a great coach and his staff is a great staff. They are recruiters and they'll have good players. What we know is the things that have given us trouble last year, we know we're going to see them. It's as much watching the things that Vanderbilt did to hurt our defense, what other teams did to hurt our defense. It’s about watching what blitzes hurt our offense and watching what they do and watching their personnel. So, this is kind of a sleepless week in all those regards. We’ll approach that process as best we can and understand that at the end of the day it'll come down to the players playing well. So we want to make sure we do things that they feel comfortable with and things that they've done a training camp.”

***On if there is hope that Gerry Bohanon will get in the game Saturday…
“***We'll have to wait and see. Gerry has had a good camp and [Jacob] Zeno has also had a really good camp. Both those guys are good quarterbacks. I'll never know when the opportunities come, but when they do, you know, I expect Gerry to play at a high level and I expect Zeno to play at a high level.”

***On Rob Saulin moving to tight end…***“Rob [Saulin] was playing well on the d-line. So for guys who played a couple of positions, I always say hey, get him for a couple of plays so he went over to tight in one day, on an inside run and had a block. And he looked different. He actually came to me and said, hey coach, can I talk to you? And you know, I think he said to me, I'm not 250 pounds anymore, I'm 300 pounds, but I feel really athletic when I'm on the offensive side of the ball. So he'll be a right tackle for us. He'll be a two or a one depending on where we're at or left tackle. And then he'll also play tight end. And so we're blessed now to have a 310 pound guy that can still run.We’ve thrown him a couple of nakeds and a couple of drop back passes and he's got great hands. He's an old basketball player. So hopefully that'll give us some oomph up front, but he also gives us some flexibility to go play on the o-line. And he knows our defense, he can go over and play there if we have an injury. We always talk about guys trying to figure out, transform themselves and find a way to be great. Winners find a way to win. You know, winners don't wait for the depth chart to work out for them. They find a way and he's a winner. And so Rob is going to play a lot of football for us.”

On if there is a Big 12 school that resembles SFA…
“You know, there's not really a lot of pistol teams in the league. You know, we're playing a little more three down. And so when we played like Texas Tech in the past, when you play OU, they run a lot of pure outside zone the way these guys do. And these guys run it really, really well. I don't know their defense, that's what we did a lot of at Temple. And so there's a lot of checks involved with that, getting to the right look and they seem like they get to the right look a lot. And so their offensive coordinator does a great job, if they're playing Tarleton and they have to throw it 77 times, then they will throw it 77 times. Or if they need to run it 50 times, they’ll run it 50 times. And so defensively they are a four down team and will play one high and they will load the box, they’ve got a good pressure package. For us as we've moved to a three down team, transitioning back to practice again against four down has been a little hard for us over the last couple of days, but we'll get there. I think they're just well coached, solid tough and I'm sure that their players have bought into coach because if you spend any time around Coach Carthel, you understand that he's an inspiring man. And so I'm sure that their players are excited to play for him and, and we know we'll get their best effort and we can't control that. We'll control our effort though.”

***On how the emphasis on turnovers has taken hold with the team…***“Joey McGuire has taken that over. Coach Snow just said, hey Joey, you handle that. And I feel like we've had a lot more than we've had in the past. That also concerns me because we've laid a lot more balls on the ground, you know, on offense than we ever have. You look at last year and we have to generate more turnovers but we also have to not turn the ball over. We turned it over 19 times and I want to get it inside of 15 and so I know it's on the present for our guys. I mean, we have a whole hallway in our building now designed to like when you walk through the building, if you don't know that the Ball is King, then you're crazy. I feel like guys get it. I think the biggest thing is when they realize if they take the ball away then they are going to play a lot more. Guys always say, ‘Hey coach, how can I get on the field?’ The answer is take the ball away when you get in the game and guess what I'll do, I'll get you on the field more. So I think we'll see that and we're not trying to take the ball away by doing gimmicky things. We're trying to go in there and dominate contact and hit people and strike with our shoulder pads and strike with our arms and try to knock the ball out, try to affect the quarterback to get the ball out. Then we also want to tip balls, disrupt balls, because a lot of picks come off of disruption. So, I think we're doing a better job of coaching it. We've assigned one person to coaching it and you know, I watched the game the other night and Miami gets a turnover and my son starts yelling about the turnover chain. I'm just never going to be that guy. That’s just not me. I think it’s an awesome thing, but it’s their thing. I think for us it's just going to come down to our guys playing physical football and I feel like we're well on our way. I'm really more concerned right now about if we are going to protect the football or if we are going to be loose with it.”

***On Sam Tecklenburg and Jordan Williams being named team captains…***“This is my seventh year as the head coach and first time I’ve ever had a captain. And it really started with Teck and he was the overwhelming, overwhelming choice. Guys voted for him for single digits, even though they knew he couldn't have it. For a young person, he is a humble, humble, humble leader. Guys follow him and that, I don't care what race you are, I don't care what age you are, I don't care what position you are. They all respect that guy. I respect that guy. And so and then as we started doing it, then you looked at other guys and some other guys got votes, but Jordan Williams really had a niche there. He is a guy who has gone full circle in terms of doing things that we ask. And I don't ask anyone to be perfect, but I do ask them to try and get better every day. That's all I'm doing. You know, I'm just trying to get a little bit better every day. And so those were two I thought, great choices. And we'll have game captains every week. So, Jameson Houston, who's had a great camp and he's a guy to me that is ready to go out and be a great corner. He’s got all the talent and now he's got the confidence to do it. And RJ Sneed was just fantastic this camp. Day in and day out, he grinded his way through it and took care of himself. So those will be our four captains this week and then we'll pick two game captains every week as we move forward to make sure we honor our entire senior class.”

***On if he’s feeling more comfortable going into year three…***
“You know, that’s a great question. Maybe my wife can answer that, what do you think Julie? I just think there is so much more familiarity between us and the players, but also, there's a whole freshman class that needs to be brought along. And so to me, anytime I start to feel comfortable, I realize I'm not working hard enough. Anytime I start to relax, I realize I'm not working hard enough. And so my job is not uncomfortable, but my job is to make sure that we're doing what needs to be done all the time. And I've got great coaches, I've got a great support staff and we've got great players. My job is to make sure they have everything they need and to make sure everyone's doing what they're supposed to do because we all want to just relax every once in a while. So, to me I'm very happy and at peace with where we are but, Coach Paterno used to say ‘run scared,’ and man, I am running scared right now. We need to have a sense of urgency and we've got to find a way to get this done this week and get it done at a high level and then relax on Saturday night. Then win, lose or draw, wake up Sunday and start running again. I'm running right now and hopefully our whole team is.”

***On if moving to a three-down front is proving to be the right move…***“I feel a hundred thousand percent based on what I've seen in practice that it is. That being said you know, we were a four-down front for so long that we kind of knew what people were going to do to attack us, so we could practice those things. You know, people will know what to do to attack this defense. Now will our guys recognize it and go attack it? And really playing defense is everyone gets so worked up on the first quarter, but nobody really wins a game in the first quarter. I mean, when you have good teams and there is a talent disparity maybe, but really the game is won at the end of the second quarter and in the second half.And so can our guys learn as the game goes on? You know, when you start going out and playing the game and you give up a touchdown or something bad happens, the guys get sad and they go to the sideline, coaches start yelling, players start yelling, you're a bad team. Can we go to the sideline and can we adjust to the things that they're doing? Can we go out there and say, hey, here's their key runs, here's their protection. That's what great teams do. And so that'll be a little bit new for us in this defense. But I think we have guys that are studying and I think we have coaches that are studying. And so this has been a challenge for the coaching staff too. We'll have to go out there in game one and do the best we can at it, find a way to win and find a way to win at a high level and then come back and say, hey, what did we not do well and then fix that. Because before every accident there is a warning and last year our accident was the Duke game. But there were all the warning signs ahead of time. And so we've watched those first two games and the Duke game this preseason with our team. And we saw us not running to the ball. We saw us having stupid penalties, but we were able to win. And then all of a sudden we lost, well, we're focused now. I think we have a process-oriented team. I can say process, but I think they're starting to live it where they understand. If we want to be great, we have to be great at preparation all week. And then in the game we have to study the game in game. We can't be on the sidelines dancing and singing and having fun. We need to be working the whole game. And then we can celebrate if we win afterwards. I think we're headed that direction.”