Baylor Football Head Coach Matt Rhule
Weekly Press Conference
September 2, 2019

***Opening Statement***
“Appreciate you guys for being here and covering us as always. Obviously very happy with the result on Saturday. Thought our guys played hard, played the game the right way, didn’t beat ourselves, not a lot of penalties. Looked like good, clean football for the most part. I was happy to see those guys walk away with a win. Happy for a lot of our young players. I think 36 players had a chance to play for the first time. I think that brings us to 79 true freshman and redshirt freshman over the last three years that have gotten into a game. It’s been a youth movement and it’s fun to see that continue this year. A lot of respect for Stephen F. Austin and Coach Carthel. I thought their guys battled till the end. I certainly left there saying to him that I knew that he’ll have that team back in playoff contention in no time. Lot of respect for them. Excited this week to turn our attention to UTSA. Frank Wilson is a tremendous coach and his teams play with a great edge. They play the game the right way. They’re physical, they’re hard-nosed, and they’re tough. Both games the last two years, obviously, have come down to the very end of the game so we’re preparing ourselves for a four-quarter battle versus an outstanding opponent. On Saturday, they had a great win over Incarnate Word and Frank Harris jumped off the screen. Having the chance to see the TV copy and now watching the game film, he’s a special, special player. Our guys that are from that area after the game were already talking about him before they’d even seen him play. They knew him from high school. Have a lot of respect for what he put on tape both as a passer and as a runner. Over 300 yards of total offense and you can see that he makes their offense certainly go. Defensively, they’re a hard-nosed, physical defense. Play 12 defensive linemen, play man coverage, blitz you. So, we’ll have to be right on all cylinders to be able to handle all the things they’re bringing. Excited to get back to work. It was good to get in there last night and work with the guys. They’ll take today off and we’ll get back to work tomorrow morning preparing for this game.”

***On UTSA being a team they know fairly well….***
“They’ve had some changes. It’s been a different offensive coordinator this year than it was last year. I know Jeff Kastl, he’s a really good coach. He was their passing game coordinator last year. Defensively, Coach Golding was the D.C. two years ago and he moved on, but they’ve kept the same things. They do a tremendous job defensively. They are hard to move the football against. They give you tough looks and they’re just really good up front. They have big physical players that play really, really hard. You watch defenses right now across the country, not everyone plays hard. They play hard. That brings a lot of challenges to us. At the end of the day, their ethos you know, I think we know that. We know that their a tough, rugged group that can run, that is going to play hard, that’s going to swarm to the ball, that’s going to challenge you with the run game. They’ve added in perimeter screens now and they’ll throw the ball deep. Tariq Woolen is a big play threat for them. We recruited him. He’s got great track times at 6’4. There’s a lot of things to have to deal with.”

***On there being a big jump from week one to week two…***

“Well, week one you’re in training camp, you’re in practices. You are kind of practicing for three hours, two hours or however long you practice. You make a mistake, you drop a ball, you block the wrong guy, you just go right to the next play. There’s not a lot of consequences to that. Then all of a sudden you get into a game and you drop that same ball and you have to go stand on the sideline because you have to punt. You blow a coverage, all of a sudden now it’s a touchdown and it affects the scoreboard. The ability to handle those emotions is way different. You don’t get to just go right back out there, you have to stand on the sideline. You have to, in the middle of a game, deal with the crowd, deal with all the different things. It’s just different. So, you have to get out there and see how do you manage the game itself. Are you able to stay focused on each play or do you let your mind wander? Do you have a veteran group that answers a score with a score and answers a stop with a stop, or do you have guys that are just kind of floating through the game? It’s just all of that. Then you have the chance to go out there against someone who’s really game planned you. They find holes in what you do. Those mistakes you made, and we showed a whole tape yesterday, the mistakes we made in this game and the good things we did in this game. You saw in practice R.J. Sneed making those catches, that’s not a surprise to anybody because he makes them day in and day out. You hope that this week guys come back and they are really deliberate practice. That they’re saying to themselves, ‘I overran the ball too much,’ or ‘I reach too much,’ or ‘I didn’t move my feet on contact on the offensive line.’ Guys go into practice not wanting to put that on tape two weeks in a row. What I like about our football team is that they’re very mature in that regard. I got text messages from guys on Saturday night that start for us that were saying ‘I didn’t do this well enough.’ If you play your first college game, you’re supposed to be out celebrating and having fun. They’re saying, ‘hey, I didn’t do this right.’ That means they’re thinking the right way.”

***On blocking kicks…***“It’s certainly not scheme. We just sent three guys on the punt. The field goals, we just have one field goal block. We have another one we do if we need it, but we have one field goal block. It really comes down to players. If you ever notice our field goal block team, when they rush, they never look to see if the ball was made or not. That’s just something we believe in. It doesn’t matter if it went through or not. All that matters is our effort. Anytime you start to have success in something it starts to take hold and take root. What was cool about the field goal block, I think it was Gabe Hall. He’s a true freshman, that’s all he knows ‘hey, take five steps and rise,’ and he should’ve had the second one. I think it’s cultural, it becomes part of the organization where guys, we go to those periods, and guys take them really seriously. Blake Lynch, here’s a senior playing on special teams, and he’s running in there to go block the kick because he knows how important it is. Hopefully we can continue to get those. It’s something that we really believe in and we think it can really change a game.”

***On areas to improve on going into next week…***“I didn’t like our rush lanes at times. The quarterback was able to get outside and that’s certainly going to be an issue with Frank Harris this week who’s a dynamic runner. We have to improve in that regard. We left some guys wide open in flats. Guys just kind of coming out of coverage. They hit a wheel route on us to get the one drive going. They had some guys open as they scrambled around so that has to improve. I didn’t like our pass protection. Quarterback got hit too many times, even though we took no sacks he got hit too many times. We had to rely too much on perimeter runs. We weren’t able to line them up and run the ball between the tackles. So, there’s a lot to improve on in a lot of little areas. Our punt return game, we should’ve had two big long explosive punt returns and we didn’t. We didn’t make the block that mattered. We kind of loafed to be quite honest. We’re not in a position where we can just give away opportunities for big plays. We’ve got to take advantage of every opportunity we get. We’ll get those things corrected. When you go back in and you see the film, you see ‘man, if I made my block, Grayland’s going to take this one about 60 yards.’ It has more of an effect on you and you hope that guys come back this week and they play just a little bit harder when they’re not sure if they have to.”

***On the play of Blake Bedier and Prince Pines…***“I think both those guys early were a little bit jittery and then they settled down - they are both really good players. Prince [Pines] is a big, big man at 340 pounds and he had a big match up - he was blocking a guy bigger than him. We won some and lost some - he got better as the game went on. I think he will enter this week with more confidence. We were able to get Casey Phillips in at right tackle and to me, he is like a co-star and he is good enough to start for us. Jason Moore was able to get some reps in and at the end we were able to get a bunch of guys on the O-line - with some of the new rules on playing four games. All of those guys that their time has not yet come were able to get a little taste of it.”

***On the overall game performance…***“I thought the fact that we didn’t give away any home runs on defense was really pleasing and we struck hard - there were a lot of big hits in the game. I thought Chris Miller was a cannon out there, flying around out there. I was happy with those things. I thought we did a decent job at time on runs and other times we didn’t do a good job at the run. There’s a lot of things we can correct on. I thought Bravvion [Roy] played a great game at the nose and sometimes those things don’t show up until you turn the tape on, but he gave great effort so a lot of areas that I hate to signal a few things out. You know the kickoff team, obviously the touchback team and the punt team - we had a bunch of nice hits. There were a lot of good things, I told our team, you didn’t play bad and you didn’t play well, you just played how you played. Just get past all of the labels and you played like you played, whether good or bad who cares what you label it, just try to do better next week. That’s my focus, I want to do a better job next week. I thought our sideline was a disaster at times - our sideline needs to be better. So, everything needs to be better.”

***On preparation and speed…***
“I was pleased - we practiced hard all week and they were ready for the game. I think we had 19 guys over 19 mph. We had guys hitting 22 mph and those are big numbers. So I was pleased with all that and our guys understand now that they need to get themselves ready for the game on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to have a chance to go out and win the game on Saturday. I was pleased with our preparation. I think our guys took care of their bodies and we ran fast in the game. Obviously, we have a few things we need to correct in the game, too many drops and those things are going to happen in the game of football when you are being physical especially when you play teams like UTSA. You better be able to match to win.”

***On JaMycal’s play…***“I thought JaMycal [Hasty] ran into some blitzes and he kind of got what he was going to get. [John] Lovett and the offense line saw the zone pressure coming and made a great check and great job by [Jake] Fruhmorgen and Charlie [Brewer] got us in the right play and he was able to make him miss. We have three great backs. You saw Abram [Smith] get in there, he is a great back, Qualan [Jones] is going to be a great back, so I think they are all going to keep playing. The key is going to be trying to get around everyone so, it's going be hard to get the ball to everybody. When guys get the ball, they have to do things with it and Lovett played really well and is dynamic - it will be a matter of trying to get guys hot this week again”

***On Xavier Newman and Johncarlo Valentin…***“Xavier [Newman] is available to play if we need him. We are trying to see if we can hold him and use him for four games. With emergence of Prince Pines, he was right there with me and he is responsible for me and keeping me calm during the game. If we can, we will try to, but we will take it week by week and we try and do it the first two weeks. He was running with the twos and why use another game on him. He is such a willing player to come in and play as a freshman and sophomore, but his best days are ahead of him so we are going to see if we can do it and he knows he is ready to play. The same thing with Johncarlo [Valentin], he is running with the twos and Casey [Phillips] has had such an ascension, we felt like maybe we could save him for four games as well. So, no promises on that and we are going to see how this week goes. Both guys practice with the twos for us and they will play for us if we need them, but we won’t play them at times we don’t need them.”

***On the potential redshirting of Xavier Newman…***“To be quite honest, Xavier [Newman], that was him saying to me, ‘hey coach should I redshirt?’ I don’t know the answer to these things. I talked to guys and if you want to consider this, if the player will put the team above themselves, then I will put the players’ interest above the team. Xavier said coach what do you think and I said if we can do it, I think we should do it. He got hurt last year and if I could go back, I would not have played him at the end. He thought he was going to come back and play, but he got hurt again. Luckily, he was able to play in the Tech game and the bowl game. There is just not a better kid on the team than X and I think they all realize the power of redshirting after two years. They saw Jalen Hurd do and [James] Lockhart do it. You have a chance to play and then kinda catch your breath and take a year to develop their body. Jared [Atkinson], Grayland [Arnold] as you mentioned with the success they are having and so X, we are playing him at center now, he can also play at guard, he is ready to go if we need him. But right now, we are not using him as a two and same thing with Johncarlo. He came in last year and really should have redshirted after his junior college career and we did not have that luxury so he played the best he could for us and got better as the year went on. If he is able to redshirt this year, he could have a monster year next year, so we will continue to try to do that and we never want to sacrifice this season, but we are going to build for the future as well.”

***On redshirting…***“They are not the starters right now and I would never redshirt a starter. They are running with the twos so Johncarlo was hurt for camp and that might have hurt him a little bit. X is there if we need him but he can play four games. Ty Smith is a great backup center for us who can go in and help us in the games. Khalil Keith is coming on so we have a lot of depth. If they are disappointed or not I don’t know, all these are their choices, these are never my choices, I don’t say hey you are redshirting, that’s not my style, not my way. I say is this something you want to do, they say this is something coach I want to look into and we take it week by week. There might be other guys who do it after we go through a few weeks and we have no idea what the future will bring - you get through the game and all of a sudden, a few guys go down and you are a starter. Their job each week is to prepare as they are the starter at all positions, every guy on the team and we see what happens.”

***On if the play of Charlie Brewer…***“I thought he handled protections well. They gave us a bear front and he recognized the MIKE coming and he got the ball out of his hand for a big fourth and sixth conversion. I thought both those touchdowns to R.J. [Sneed] he checked to get us to and as I said earlier that touchdown to Lovett he checked versus the blitz, so I think his ability now to really play like a pro, see what’s happening and get us in the right play versus those pressures to me is the big difference.”

***On scoring 45 and 56 points the last two games, on this being the offense he envisioned…***

“This is not me being smart, I want to score more points than the other team. And so, what I want to do is I want to have the ability and then this is Jeff [Nixon] and Glenn [Thomas] and those guys creating it. I want two things from our offense. I want us to be an offense that doesn’t beat ourselves, I want us to be an offense that utilizes our good players. I don’t want our good players not touching the football because of scheme. It’s always going to be about the players for us. And then I want to have the ability to, when we have the lead, to run the football. That’s why I kind of joked after the game that we got out of there in 3 hours and 15 minutes, I don’t want to play five-hour games when we have the lead. If we don’t have the lead, then I want to play for five hours, I want to keep it going. The Vanderbilt game, we had to win one way. But, we led the Big 12 in time of possession last year and still scored some points. We got up Saturday night, ran the football. And when we did throw it, we kind of threw it on the perimeter, protected the lead.  Unfortunately, we fumbled once, gave them the ball back. But, that’s kind of what I want to be. So, if it means we have to get in two backs and run the ball to win the game, I want to do that. I really believe in real football, in good football when you’re facing good teams, you never know how you’re going to have to win that game. You can go out and kind of do your thing against teams you’re better than. But, when you play really good teams, you may have to run the quarterback 40 times, you might have to throw it 40 times. You never know what it’s going to take to win that game. So, I just want to make sure we have enough in what we do where we can handle those situations. That’s why i went two-minute (offense) before the half, and we failed in that. We didn’t move the ball in two-minute (offense). We tried to give ourselves some situations in that game to see how we were going to respond. Some we did well, some we didn’t. But we’ll just keep trying to be a team that no matter the situation, we have an answer.”

***On the team’s concentration during the game…***

“I thought we had a little bit of a lull in the second quarter, I thought at the end of the game, you hate that we gave up 10 points in the fourth quarter. But, I thought it was more important to get the young guys in, and they hit a play or two, which we have to learn from. The standard doesn’t change based upon who’s in the game, I think it’s one of the reasons why we’re on the field so long for practice. We try to get out there for walk-throughs and stuff and we’re always over two hours – not in-season maybe, and Thursday and Friday. But, in preseason, teaching young people how to focus for a long time. I think the biggest thing is the game is not three hours straight, it’s you’re out there and then you sit for 10 minutes,12 minutes. So, I thought it was good, I challenged the coaches to continue to coach when it was 35-7 at halftime. I found all the things at halftime I wasn’t happy about. I challenged the coaches if we were losing by 21, same thing yesterday. Because here’s what I know, there were some teams in our league that had some close calls.  The Big 12 was 10-0 this week, which is great, but there were some teams who had some close calls, and I bet you they walked in after that game and the team was like, ‘Hey, we’ve got to get better.’ And they’ll get better as a result. We got better last year not when we won, we got better when we lost. When we lost games, our team said, ‘Hey, we’ve got to fix this.’ That’s the way we all are. So, my challenge to us is we have to get better at things even though we won the game. And I feel like guys are trying to do that. We’ll see how it goes tomorrow.”

***On tracking players’ speeds during the game…***

“They wear these catapult units, probably most of college football does it now. They calculate how much they ran, how many high-velocity yards they ran. They count how fast they got. So, like Tyquan Thornton or Mark Milton had like 23 (mph) during preseason, which is really, really, really fast. , so like Tyquan Thornton or Mark Milton had like 23 in preseason which is really fast. So, to get 22 in a game, because you don’t really have that many chances to really open up and run for a long distance, it has to happen on kickoff. So, to have that many guys hit that number means we were running on Saturday. It’s a great way for me to say, ‘Hey, how fast are we really running?’ Sometimes, there have been guys who I think loaf because of how they run, and then they run really fast on the GPS. So, it kind of helps you in those regards.”

***On helmet stickers…***

“We told our guys that we’re going to start a new tradition and give them some stickers for their individual achievements. So, on the left side, we put things for guys who made elite this summer, four or five times out of seven. We did it for guys who had a 3.0 during the spring or summer, personal best. We did it for guys who made all the practices of the preseason. We put a graduate cap for the 14 guys who’ve graduated. On the right-hand side, if we run for 200 yards, we’ll give them a helmet sticker. No sacks (on offense), if you get a sack, you get a turnover. And then down the middle are for the ones in-games. So, if you hit an explosive home run, we’ll give you one. If you block a kick, we’ll give you one, and if you take the ball away we’ll give you one in-game. As I told the team, I’m a Pen State guy originally, no names on the jersey and nothing on the helmet. But, I do know that what gets measured and rewarded gets done. So, we’ll do those things. And to me, it’s still an homage to old-school college football. Helmet stickers have been around for a long time. So, we’ll do it, and the kids seem pretty excited about it. They have more swagger than they realize. So, we’ll give it a shot, and it seemed like they liked it, so we’ll continue to do it.”

***On if SFA’s defense was trying to take away the deep ball…***

“They were playing man-to-man coverage. We threw a couple. We threw one to Tyquan [Thornton] down the left side, they defended. We threw one down to [Denzel] Mims down the left side, they defended it. And then we threw that one where he got behind them. But, I think at the end of the day, I think we were able to stay pretty much in-rhythm. Some of our underneath stuff hit. But, we would like to be a deep-play team. There were some things we had dialed up that when the score got away, it just didn’t feel right to throw those then. And then we got Charlie [Brewer] out and got Gerry [Bohanon] in there. We’ll probably have to hit a couple more deep balls to keep people honest, especially if they’re going to come out and play man coverage against us. Denzel and Tyquan are so fast, Marques [Jones] is so fast, [Chris] Platt, we have to push the ball down the field.”