Baylor Football Head Coach Matt Rhule
Weekly Press Conference
November 4, 2019

***Opening Statement***“Appreciate everyone being here, thanks as always for covering us, really excited this week to have a chance to go play TCU, Coach [Gary] Patterson is doing a great job as always, should be a tremendous challenge for us, it’s an honor to play against some of their tremendous players, Jalen Reagor’s one of my favorite players as a college football fan, dynamic, tough, great punt returner, great receiver, and presents a lot of challenges as he did last year and he’s complimented by a whole host of other skilled players that are playing at a really high level, Taye Barber and many more, obviously we know quarterback got banged up at the end of the game but we know they have multiple quarterbacks who can play at a high level so we’re prepared for all that. They bring into the game the nation or Big 12, I’m not sure, but at least the Big 12’s #1 red zone offense and we’ve been playing pretty good red zone defense so it’ll be quite a challenge, quite a matchup and then defensively, outstanding defense yet again, #1 or 2 in pretty much every defensive category in the league. They have one of the best players in college football in Ross Blacklock and a dominant defensive tackle who missed last year, gave us fits two years ago and he’s back and he’s better than ever so it’ll be quite a challenge for our offensive line especially coming off of a last game where we didn’t play very well up front and it’ll be quite a challenge so we’re excited, glad it’s an 11:00 game, I like early games and to get up and go play some football and we hope that Baylor people come up and support us in Fort Worth.”

***On TCU’s defense…
“***I think it starts, first of all, with Coach Patterson, I mean, he does a masterful job of taking away the things that you do well and so you go into a game like this you know he’s going to take away your top three runs in every formation, your top three passes, they’re going to take it away by scheme and then they have great players playing really aggressively, they don’t give you free stuff, you know, they sit there, they play press man, their safety’s flat foot and they’re going to sit there and they’re going to challenge you to throw the ball deep and then they’re going to go compete for the ball, they’ve got great ball skills and then they got great players, dominant, defensive players, great corners, [Jeff] Gladney has been around for a long time, he’s an outstanding player, lot of speed. At linebacker, you know, they’re 215, 212, you know, they’re guys who can run sideline to sideline and then he does have the ability to blitz, it’s really subtle things that he does to take away the different things that you do and you have to make a decision hey, do we change everything we do or do we let our players play and so I think this is a game where our players have to go out and compete against their players and try to make plays and know that nothing will come easy but you have to find a way. You know, in the last two years we’ve faced them we’ve turned the ball over six times, three times each game and we haven’t taken the ball away from them so people love to talk about this play and that play and all this, if you win the turnover battle you have a chance and we lost a turnover battle for the first time against West Virginia and that hurt and so we’re going to get back to what the fundamentals of protecting the football versus a group that’s taken the ball away from us a lot.”

***On TCU WR Jalen Reagor…***
“He’s got great speed, but he’s got elite ball skills and you know, it’s not just the ability to catch the football, it’s also the ability to adjust in the areas, has a 40 inch vertical, you can be running with him he can jump up and catch the ball, I think it’s really his running after the catch, last year he torched us on a middle screen where seven, eight guys had a chance to tackle him and he’s just so elusive and the final thing I’ll say is he’s just tough, a lot of guys don’t want to go back there with, he’s a first round draft pick someday, they don’t want to go back there and catch punts, well he loves to compete, he’s going to go back there, he’s going to catch punts, he got banged, I was watching the game the other day just as a fan, you know, he gets banged up, they pull him off the field and he’s right back out there so to me, you take guys like Tylan Wallace, my heart was broke when I saw him get hurt the other day, but you take Tylan Wallace, you take Jalen Reagor, it’s not just that they’re talented, it’s really the talent plus the toughness and competitiveness that sets them apart, it’s why they’ll have great, great pro careers.”

***On if there is an advantage to having played last Thursday instead of Saturday….***“Just, not much, maybe just a chance to regroup, you know, a little bit, but we didn’t meet with the kids, the players on Friday or Saturday so we all started on Sunday just like they did. At the end of the day, these other teams have had a full bye week and we didn’t get one so it is what it is, we just tried to maybe go out recruiting a little bit Friday and then regroup on Saturday and come in Sunday ready to go.”

***On TCU’s offense…***
“Well, they’re playing a freshman quarterback, you know, and so that’s a hard thing to do, but I think Coach [Sonny] Cumbie’s done a fantastic job, I mean, you see him developing, he went out and beat Texas, they put him in a position to go beat Oklahoma State so you can see that he’s going to be a great, great, great football player and he was a great football player these last two games and so we have to try to just limit him and it’s not just his arm, it’s also his feet, he does a great job of scrambling, he’s done a great job in the run game and they’re well put together, they have the ability to run the football, they’re not just a passing team they have the ability to run the football, the ability to run the quarterback and throw the football as well so they’re coming around and clicking at the right time, it’ll be quite a challenge.”

***On Xavier Newman stepping in to play on Thursday…***
“I didn’t want to do it, but I did it and he wanted to do it so he did it and he was ready to go and he texted me after the game, he was excited that he played well and then we won the game so we’ll move forward with him.”

***On getting back depth on the offensive line…***
“Well, I mean, he’s been playing right, but I think the biggest thing is Khalil [Keith] got in there and played and we see that Khalil has the chance to be a starter, he’s really, really going to be a good player and then getting Connor [Galvin] back will help, you know, and some of our guys, the guys that tackled, that didn’t play real well, they played pretty well against Oklahoma State so when you’re a young player you have to have some bad games to come back and have good games, you know, and so my challenge to those guys was and [Blake] Bedier an older player but he’s a first year guy and Casey [Phillips] like go suffer, watch the film again, go suffer through it right, like because the next time you’re out there, you’re going to have games like that where it’s a tough matchup, you know, you have to find ways to adapt and you can’t sit there and panic, and the only thing I was disappointed with on Thursday and I’m trying not talk too much about Thursday, but the only thing I was disappointed with was that our players, some of our players are starting to hear too much and they’re starting to think we have to win a certain way, like you don’t have to win a certain way, like who are we to say we have to win a certain way like we were picked sixth in the conference, how about we just try to win each game and not listen to everybody saying hey you should win this way you should win that way like just try to win the game and so what happens is they get on the sideline, they start panicking. I pride myself, I always tell our guys I want to have the best locker room and best sideline in football and our sideline wasn’t very good, you know, we have coaches yelling at the officials, we have players yelling at other players, we have people that, you know, just play football man, you guys don’t yell at each other like that in practice so some of those young kids get out there and they were struggling, they have other guys yelling at them, they’re yelling back, I’m like do you think that helps you play better, you know, like I yell a lot in practice, but you don’t see me yell very much or get in a player’s face at a game cause I think gamedays are for them, my job’s during the week now you got to go play and so I think you learn lessons from every game, I’m glad we’ve learned it in a win, but I think the biggest thing is to stop worrying about how people value cause no one cared when you weren’t winning that much, no one evaluated the wins, but now that you’re winning people’s job is to find out what’s wrong with your team, people are like did you hear what so and so said on ESPN, well, that’s his job, his job is to find out what you don’t do well cause that’s what makes good TV so you can either listen to that or you can just say you know what I better focus on playing a little bit better this week and so that’s to me, that’s why I bring up the turnover battle like we’re not going to win if we, we’re not going to beat TCU if we don’t win the turnover margin so how about we worry about that and not worry about everything else so that’s , I think there’s so many lessons to learn, you know, cause some programs, you look at the teams that are undefeated right now, a lot of those teams have been undefeated a lot with their players right like if you’re at Clemson or Alabama don’t you think you’re probably used to hey this how we handle being 8-0, we’re sitting there and we haven’t really been 8-0, we’ve been 0-8, we know how to do that, but we haven’t been 8-0 so how do you handle that and it’s here’s how you handle it guys so Thursday night for me was frustrating, but I think, I was proud of our players cause they showed grit and determination, now that being said, we have to learn from it and the key is not to write a script before the game of how the game’s going to go, that’s how people lose, they say okay we’re going to do this, this, this and this, they get in the game, it’s not going that way and then they panic and that’s the same thing as a player, I prefer to sit there and say okay I am going to do this, this and this against this player, now if he starts edging me, if I can’t block him, you know, he’s beating me what am I going to do, I am going to go do this, this and this so you already have a plan in your head for when things are going well and when things aren’t going well and so I’m trying to teach young guys that that most often as a lineman don’t learn until their second year in the NFL and they’re having to block, you know Jadeveon Clowney, then they start to say what am I am going to go to if I can’t block him so I thought there were a lot of things in the game that we could learn but globally, as a program, we need to learn to stop worrying about what people say and just worry about what we can do and control what we can control, which is the same message I’ve said for two years, it’s just coming at a different context now so let’s see if we can do it this week.”

***On the growth of the team winning close games this year…***
“Maturity, I mean, they like those games, I mean, I think in all these close games we’re pretty even with those teams. I like to learn from older coaches and I listened to Coach Patterson, he said something like, ‘we are just good enough to beat everybody and we are just good enough to lose to everybody.’ And if you’ve listened to what I say in the press conference at the beginning of the year I say I think we have a chance to beat everyone on our schedule and I think every team has a chance to beat us. I think we are a team that isn’t going to overwhelm you early. We are not there yet. I would like to get there, but we are not where we can just roll the balls out there and be up 28-0. We are going to have to show grit and fight and try to wear you down. We are going to keep it close, keep it close and then in the second half when the other team maybe gets tired, we are a pretty conditioned, pretty tough team and our offensive line now, most of our sacks were early, the first three drives were atrocious and then once we kind of kept staying with it, we can protect a little bit more, hold on a little bit more and then our guys get to the fourth quarter and that was our first fourth quarter shutout, which is a big thing we talk about but we haven’t really done it this year. So, I think it is just maturity, physical and mental maturity and I think we have a quarterback who loves to go play in those games. He likes to be out there. Tyquan went out there and caught that ball and now we also have a defense that is giving us a chance in the fourth quarter as well.”

***On if he will handle the CFP rankings any differently with the players…***
“I am pretty sure they are not going to put us in the top four, so I’m just going to tell our guys, hey let’s just worry about this week and this game. It is all unchartered territory for our team so I keep going out and saying my way is to not pay attention to any of that. It is to just focus on this week and us. Some other people have a different way. You are young, it’s exciting and people are talking about you. Which way is working better? How about we do it my way and how about we make my way our way. And we have a lot of older guys who are doing that. They are saying hey, let’s just focus on what we can control and go out there and play. And thankfully we are playing TCU, because that is a team our players know. Just like West Virginia, we haven’t beaten them in several years. They know what it will take to go up there and win on the road there. So, I think that gets their attention more than anything else. We are probably not going to be 17-point favorites, it is going to be all about TCU this week as it should. That has always been my message, control this week, but those things are out there, I can’t say they aren’t going there and they are fun to hear about, but the quickest way to get rid of all that stuff is to not focus on what you are doing. So, we have got to improve. Thankfully, there are a lot of things to improve. If you sat in that special teams meeting yesterday, I promise you, you would not be thinking about anything outside of here. If you sat in that offensive line meeting or offensive meeting, you wouldn’t be worried about those things over here. The other thing is, I don’t want them to feel pressure. I don’t want them to go the other way and say, ‘I’ve got to play better.’ Relax, man, go out there and practice, prepare and go play.”

***On if you look at last year’s TCU game as a turning point, that was your last loss…***

“That’s a great question, usually I’m not speechless. The week before, against Iowa State, I thought we were like we were this past week. We were way too tense, way too worried about winning. So, we came against Iowa State like that. We came out against TCU, and it was a lot of the same things. We got into that battle in that game, and it was the same thing. We talk about the fourth quarter, they just made more plays than us down the stretch. They made one more play than us in the fourth quarter. I thought we came out the next week against Texas Tech, and we were losing at halftime, and there was no, ‘I can’t believe we’re losing at halftime.’ It was like, ‘We’ve got to win this half to go to a bowl game, so our season wasn’t over.’ It wasn’t all these things in our head, it was, ‘We just have to win this game, and we’ll get another game.’ That’s the humble mindset that I love, humble confidence. I’m confident enough that I’m going to play, but I’m humble enough that I’m going to go prepare and I’m going to stay focused on the mission at hand. So, I just think that TCU loss last year was a really hard one. And I think, if anything, TCU was coming off a tough loss to West Virginia. And our guys learned, you know what, when you’re a program like TCU and you lose a game and you’re fighting to go to a bowl game, you’re going to come out and you’re going to play your best football. And we didn’t play great.

The things that I learned from that game is we gave up five sacks, we had 140 yards rushing, which isn’t very good, and we had three turnovers. So, I don’t care what you do. We fumbled the ball on the 5-yard line going in, we got stopped on a fourth-and-1, we threw a pick in the red zone. We fumbled on the second play of the game. You’re not going to win very many games if those things happen. Always trying to take all these stories and storylines and bring it back to football. They played better football that day. We turned the ball over. So, my message this week is pretty simple to our guys: Don’t turn the football over. Don’t have nine penalties, like we did Thursday night. And let’s go play good football and see what happens.”

***On the impact of JaMycal Hasty on the program…***

“As much as anyone. He’s graduated in three years, he’s as tough as anyone, he plays on special teams, he picks up every blitz on offense, he runs the ball when we ask him to run it. He’s physical, plays through bumps and bruises. And he’s helped change our mindset. A lot of our guys had this belief that if you lifted too much and got too strong that you wouldn’t be fast. We don’t believe that, so we believe in lifting and trying to get big and strong. And JaMycal just started being a guy that if we’re lifting on Monday and Thursday, he would go in the weight room on Thursday and do extra; and go in the weight room on Wednesday and do extra. And I think as people saw his arms grow and his neck grow, some other guys that were like, ‘I don’t want to get above 188,’ they started saying, ‘Well, he’s doing it,’ and then they started doing it. And then you see Henry Black going and then you start seeing Chris Miller going and you start seeing Christian Morgan going. And the next thing you know, you have this culture of doing extra. What does it mean to work hard? It means to do extra. And he doesn’t do it by saying anything. He doesn’t say a word. Puts his headphones and goes out and lifts extra, and people watch him. So, as I’m getting done with practice and I’m trying to be the first guy out of the building so I can play ‘Call of Duty,’ I see him in there lifting. And I say, ‘Maybe that’s why he’s going to get a chance to go be a pro football player.’ Then, you start seeing the young players start circling back and saying, ‘I can go lift for 20 minutes. I can go do my neck. For a 7:30 practice, I can get in here and stretch and do mobility. All these things he’s doing, he’s doing like a pro football. So, I think the young players see it and see how it works.”

***On injuries…***

“Jameson (Houston) is questionable. Bravvion (Roy) is questionable. Gabe Hall is probably not going to play. Sqwirl (Williams) is probable, Sqwirl is hopefully back up, which is great news. And (Connor) Galvin is questionable. He did some work last night, so we’ll see. It’s just a matter of how his knee kind of handles it. I think we’ll have him for some, and we would really love to have him. It’s just a matter of how it goes this week. So, maybe probable.”

***On replacing Chris Miller at safety…***

“We’ve had some practice at now, unfortunately. We’ve had two halves where we’ve had to place with someone else in there. Jairon McVea went in against Oklahoma State and that dynamic offense and did a great job; did a great job this past week. Grayland (Arnold) stepped up. We thought Grayland was emergency only this past game. He stepped up. And we really need Christian Morgan to step up. He’s had some injuries and all that. He has a youthfulness to him, and he’s excited and everything is kind of fun to him. There’s a time where it’s like, ‘All right, Christian, now I need you to step up now and go play.’ I think we have enough guys. We’d love to have Chris out there, but I think we have enough guys and those guys have all had a chance to play some. JT (Woods) has had a chance to start a couple games. We’ll probably use them all.”