Baylor Football Head Coach Matt Rhule
Weekly Press Conference
November 11, 2019

***Opening Statement…***
“Appreciate everyone being here, thank you as always for covering us. Obviously very excited this week to get back to work and get ready for an outstanding, outstanding Oklahoma football team led by a great coach in Lincoln Riley and just a ton of great players so looking back on last Saturday was a great win for our program, a great win for our team, utmost respect for TCU and the way they play the game, I thought they played a great football game, their defense was stifling, offensively they did the things they needed to do and thought our guys found a way to keep fighting, fighting, fighting to make one more play so we knew that game would be a grind, we know how hard it is to win on the road, I probably said to someone earlier maybe I didn’t necessarily understand the rivalry, the Baylor-TCU rivalry until I sat there with the student section behind me and got a full understanding of what it truly means and I thought our guys, in a very hostile environment, handled it well and I say that with the greatest of respect, that’s what college football’s supposed to be, you’re supposed to hear that and deal with that, that’s winning on the road and I thought TCU’s fans did a great job of making it loud, we had a lot of snap count issues, things that we have to clean up, ball on the 22 yard line needed a field goal and end up kicking from the 35 or 37 or something crazy so things we can certainly do better but I was proud of our guys in overtime, the fact that we thought we won the game on the fourth down one, stormed the field and regrouped and came back and kept playing, it speaks a lot to our team, the fact that guys who hadn’t made a lot of plays all game cause of the great coverage from TCU, Denzel [Mims] made three of the best catches I think you’ll see somebody make and so thought the offensive line was significantly improved, I thought we were dominant at times on defense, guys like Terrel Bernard, obviously he had a historic day in terms of the tackles, at least historic for him, but I thought a lot of guys did their job, played hard so I’m really proud of our group for finding a way to get that win so with that we look forward to this week, College Gameday being here, we’re excited for that, my hope is obviously always for recruiting that people all across the country see that Gameday could’ve gone anywhere and they chose to come here and they chose to see this great Baylor-Oklahoma game that they see not just, I don’t want this to just be about our football program, I want it to be about the university and also about Waco, what a great place to live, what a great place to raise a family, what a great place to be and I hope that for three hours people across the country can see why they should send their kids here, why they should live here and they can learn in three hours what Julie [Rhule] and I learned very quickly that this is a great place and so we’re excited for it, excited for a great game and with that I’ll take your questions.”

***On OU QB Jalen Hurts…***
“Well, he’s an outstanding runner, first and foremost, he can run, both in terms of keeping plays alive, first in the conference in passing and they do a lot of play action and he’s able to move around and keep plays extended, he can extend drives, they’re outstanding both on offense and defense on third down, a lot of that comes from him, but there’s times where it’s like defending the single wing, they’re running quarterback counter with lead tailbacks blocking for them so they present a lot of challenges and a lot of that’s credit to him, he’s a great runner, has great vision, he’s accurate, he can do it in a multitude of different ways.”

***On how the defense needs to play against OU…***
“Yeah, I think the game, really at the end of the day, the game will come down tackling, they are as good as running after the catch team as there is, whether it’s Kennedy Brooks or CeeDee Lamb or [Jalen] Hurts, they are elite in terms of catching balls and making people miss and extending runs, just in general you see what Lamar Jackson’s doing in the NFL, 140 yards a game rushing is in the NFL will win a game and he’s because of the ability to now have an extra blocker it sends things through the roof and so anytime you can run the quarterback it’s going to require someone to get off a block cause they’re going to have a hat for a hat and they do it really well and they play action off of it cause they have a guy in Jalen [Hurts] who can also throw it and I’ve never met Jalen Hurts but when you watch him on TV, he just kind of seems like a great leader too, kind of an all-around competitive guy so it’ll be a real challenge and what it’ll end up being, is someone’s got to get off a block, someone’s got to make a tackle and I think for us we’re better when we just kind of play, when we don’t overthink and so I’m hopeful that our guys will go out there and we’ll just kind of go play football and play our defense, we’re not going to do anything special, we’re going to do what we do and hope that our guys make more plays than their guys make, knowing that we’re going to make plays and they’re going to make a lot of plays too, they’re really good, but that’s what’s fun about this game.”

***On if you can shut down OU WR CeeDee Lamb..***“I don’t think so, I think if you do that you open up, if they were just a zone running game, you could probably do some of those things, you could double him and we’ve done that with some other people that we’ve played, but he’s a great player and what I like about him is he’s aggressive, he’ll block, when he catches the ball, he’s like a tailback with the ball, he’s not like a receiver so you’ll always be short a hat if you try to take him away so I think for us we have to go play our defense, what is happening for us though is Jameson Houston’s becoming a really good corner, for us to play Jalen Reagor who I think is an outstanding, outstanding, outstanding player and hold him to one catch, to play Tylan Wallis before he got injured and he had some catches but not explosive ones, I think the difference with CeeDee [Lamb] is you have to tackle him, he catches a lot of balls in the middle of the field and it’s run after the catch as well so he’ll make his plays we just have to make sure it’s a 20 yard gain not an 80 yard gain and I think that, again, always comes back to tackling.”

***On Mims making key catches down the stretch at TCU…***
“It was a really beautifully run route too, he did some things that not a lot of guys do on that route and made an elite catch, that’s what we needed but I think Denzel [Mims], that was probably the finest 15 minutes of football he’s played in terms of those plays and here’s what was really cool to me in that game, what gets us down to the three yard line is Chris Platt making an elite catch with someone draped all over him, Denzel gets hurt in the two minute drive, he’s out and Jared Atkinson goes out there, he’s been playing better and better and better every week and Jared goes out there and he catches a curl vs. man coverage. We’dtried to throw that route twice during the game and both times the corner took it away and gets open and makes a big catch on third and 7 so I think a lot of guys stepped up but I thought in that last drive that was just three between the fade, the slant that he caught extended, and the diving slant, those were big time plays.”

***On if he sent the team to pump up the Baylor contingent at TCU before the fourth quarter…
“***I would never do that. If they did that, I think that’s really cool it means they hey let’s fire them up. Yeah, I’m so in the game like I bring them up on me, we try to get them, before the fourth quarter we try to get them all around us and we say hey we want to be a fourth quarter team so then we try to sprint down if our players did that that’s awesome cause that was you look around you’re trying to find some green, you know but I think we have such amazing support, we have the coolest group of players’ moms, I get a text every morning from a different player’s mom, we have great dads too, but the moms are elite, we have great parents, we have people, Julie [Rhule] sits in the stands with the fans, it can be hard to do for the head coach’s wife or an assistant coach’s wife, right, you can hear a lot, our fans are awesome and they’re embracing and we’re kind of rolling at the other so I appreciated how many people were there and certainly at the end I think because at the end of the game we kind of ran over and we shook everyone’s hands, we get back to the locker room and you know, all of the coaches’ kids are allowed to be on the field with us and we get in the locker room and there’s these two kids sitting there, they’re like 14 and I’ve never seen them before and I didn’t know if they were a donor’s kid or something so I look and I say “Who are you guys?” and they look at me like this and I say “No, seriously who are you guys?” and I thought they were someone’s kids and they said “oh we like Baylor now” so Taylor went to grab them and tell them to leave and I said “No stay with us,” and those guys picked them up. I still have no idea who they are, no idea, but yeah I’m always supportive of the support. They told me on the way over here that we are sold out for this weekend, which we should be. It should be a great, great, great atmosphere. It has been a wild ride through 11 games and being able to win them all. I think people have supported us, they were at the bowl game, they were on the road at TCU, so we are grateful.”

***On the play of linebacker Terrel Bernard…***
“A, I think it speaks a lot to everyone around him. I don’t want to take anything away from Terrel, he is doing what Clay [Johnston] was doing. It just goes to show you that all those guys are learning that we all have to step up. No one is playing better right now than Bravvion [Roy], Lock [James Lockhart] and Lynch and no one is playing better than J-Will [Jordan Williams] is playing. Everyone is doing their job and allowing people to flourish. I think if you ask Coach Snow he would say we could still be doing our job a lot better, so there is still room to get a lot better. But there is no doubt that people knew that Terrel when it was his turn to play was going to play at a high level. He was in there this morning watching film on his own on an off day and I just happened to walk by and see him and someone brought in donuts, I asked him if he wanted a donut. He is just as mature a young player as we have ever had. He was playing as a true freshman for us in 2017 before he hurt his foot. The great thing is we have two years left with him. He is still a young player. The best thing is he is so serious about the game and so committed to being a good player. Sometimes a guy has 19 tackles and he could be up for whatever and other guys say I could have done that too, but everyone loves Terrel because of how selfless he is and how supportive he is of his teammates. And he understands it, he is only able to flourish because Bravvion [Roy] or Chidi [Ogbonnaya] is dominating his gap and that allows us to play really well.”

***On Bernard having a knack for getting turnovers…***
“Even in the last two years when we weren’t really getting turnovers, we would always talk about strip attempts. You aren’t ever going to get the ball if you don’t even try to strip it and he was the one guy consistently who would always do that. So, when you are 206 pounds and you are playing middle linebacker and you are maybe not going to rip it out a lot, but now as he gets bigger, stronger, older, those balls start to come out. That interception was an elite interception. Not many guys can react that fast to that ball so I do believe some guys have a knack for it, but some guys work really hard at it to get that knack and I am not a big believer in instincts, I think everything is learned, and I think he works hard at things and he is really critical of himself and that allows him to go fix and improve on things he can get better at. He gets the ball out a ton. We had a goal of 40 sacks and we are at 29 sacks right now. 40 sacks means you have probably won a lot of games, I don’t know where we are in terms of takeways, but we are doing better at that and we are not turning the ball over a ton. We had two turnovers this week, one on a fluke kickoff return, but offensively, as bad as it can be at times with penalties, they protected the football other than that first interception. Winning the turnover battle was key to winning that game.”

***On if they will watch what Iowa State and K-State did against Oklahoma…***
“We look at all the teams. Defensively we look at teams that are similar to us, so that would be Iowa State, other teams that are more three-down and look and see what they did. At the end of the day, no one stopped their offense, even against Kansas State, they scored 20 points in the last four minutes, just what they can do it amazing. When you look at it offensively, they have great defensive players in [Neville] Gallimore and [Kenneth] Murray. Coach Grinch has come in there and they are playing really aggressively, so we try to come in there and say at the end of the day, what do we do well that is similar to these things. I think they are such a good team, and we are a pretty good team, that it’s going to come down to just playing. Just blocking, tackling, jumping up and catching the ball. That fourth down play to Denzel [Mims], I hear [Coach] Nixon on the headset saying, “Let’s just call whatever play, that’s our best play.” And it wasn’t like hey it’s good versus this, it was just hey let’s call our best play to our best player and let him go make a play and he made the play. Earlier in the game we weren’t necessarily making those plays, ball was in our hands, they were knocking them out, but in the end, we made just enough plays. And I think that is what this game is going to be. We can’t control them, we can certainly make sure that we do what we do well and try to make sure we play as well as we possibly can.”

***On the play of OU linebacker Kenneth Murray…*** Kenneth Murray is about as good a linebacker as there is. He should be up for every defensive award that there is. He goes sideline to sideline, he can rush off the edge, he can play man-to-man on your best back and then run through the A gap on power. He is a really special player. [Neville] Gallimore, No. 90 is an outstanding player. They really have an outstanding front. They are twitchy. They went from being a three-down team to being a four-down team. They bring pressure with just their front, they move, they slant. I think if you had to pick two, 9 and 90. But they have a bunch of really good players. Corner [Parnell] Motley has played a bunch of years, but I think across the country when the awards come out, No. 9 Kenneth Murray will be involved in the Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year, All-Big 12, he is really a special one.”

***On if the offense needs to start faster to win…***
“We have to go play. In the end of the day, if I start saying things like that then I, if I had my choice we would play great defense, great offense and great special teams for 60 minutes. In every game there are matchup issues and problems and sometimes you just need to wear people down. The issue against Oklahoma is they were up two years ago, 21-0- and 28-7 and we came back and took the lead and then they went up again 17 and we came back. So, they are as fast a starting offense as there is in the country. They were up 35-14 against Iowa State at halftime. They were up 10-0 and 17-7 against K-State. They are elite, elite in terms of Coach Riley’s game plan and their execution early in the game. Part of it is weathering the storm, just our defense. Don’t get down 21-0. Now if we do, that is what happened to us last year, we were down 14-0 and we fought back. But it is trying to start faster on defense knowing that we are more of a fourth quarter team, so you have to try to push this game to the fourth quarter. The same thing I say every week, try to make one more play than the other team makes. But we know if we can do that then we are comfortable being in that part of the game. How do you do that? You just go play. I can be uptight some weeks, but there are weeks like this where you just respect the opponent and you know it’s going to be a lot of fun and you just go play. You will prepare like crazy, we are preparing right now, and our players are preparing and we will go play and we know they will play their best game. They have a lot on the line and we will play our best game, we have a lot on the line and we will see what happens. Then we will wake up on Sunday and get ready to do it all again no matter what happens. It’s just a never-ending cycle.”

***On if it is it stressful to be in all these close games…***

“I don’t know that I love it, let me say that. It’s funny, my dad something to me after the game, he said, ‘Twenty years from now, when these guys come back, they’ll remember this game.’ I always hear people talk about 61-58, 61-58. I wasn’t here for that. I know the game. But it’s kind of like, we beat Oklahoma State on the fade, and I was like, ‘I’ll remember that forever.’ It’s kind of hard to remember that now because there’s been so many other ones. 2nd-and-17 at the minus-1-yard line against Texas Tech, and we’ve got to go drive the field to win.

But you know, Oklahoma is saying the same thing right now. What a great game they had this past Saturday, where it comes down to a two-point conversion to win the game, and they made one more play and won the game. 31-12 against Kansas State was a fun, relaxing fourth quarter. But, I like seeing young people excel. People talk a lot about, young people these days, they quit as soon as it gets hard. No, they don’t. Just look at our guys. Two years ago, they didn’t quit, they stuck through it all. Things get hard in the game, at halftime we got after each other a little bit, and we came out and we played. Just overtime, overtime, overtime. I had never been in overtime before as a head coach. And we’ve had two this year. And I was literally asking, ‘Now, this is when we have to go for two, right? And he said, ‘Yeah, if you get to the third overtime, you have to go for two. It’s just new to me. And I just thought our guys kept battling. So from that point of it, in the moment it can be stressful, but afterwards, I think you get to see some real character and toughness and competitiveness from your guys. When they make the highlight film at the end of this season, I think you’ll have some thrilling moments.”

***On if ESPN GameDay is a distraction…***

“Nah, I think it’s awesome. I’ve only had GameDay once before (Temple versus Notre Dame, in Philadelphia, on Oct. 31, 2015), and it was like open invite – come watch practice. Because it’s different, you only get GameDay when you’ve earned it. I’m not worried about our guys not being focused for the football this week. I’m not worried about that. I know our guys will be focused. I said to J-Will (Jordan Williams) and a couple of those guys, ‘Hey, 21 days, man. Can you give me 21 days? Can I give you 21 days? Can we give each other 21 days?’ We have three games left, now it’s less than 21 days. Can we all just give our best for the next 21 days? We have three chances to play. Maybe we’ll win all three, maybe we won’t. I don’t know that. But, we can give each other our best for 21 days, because the year, football feels never-ending. Like, I’m already thinking about spring ball and Jeramiah (Dickey), when’s the Green & Gold Game? We do it year around, but for this season, we have 21 days left. And then you start the postseason, obviously. I think they’ll be focused on that stuff. I think the GameDay is awesome. To me, this is a chance for us to show the country Baylor, Baylor football and Waco. Players don’t have much to do with it. I don’t have much to do with it. I think I show up for like 10 minutes on Saturday and kind of go over there and get on set and then leave. But, hopefully for everyone else, I hope you turn the TV on and it’s a mass of students and people and everyone. I hope it’s a pretty cool event, really, for the area.”

***On if Connor Galvin and Sqwirl Williams will be back this week to help the run game…***

“I don’t know that Sqwirl will be able to go. He’s close, but it’s one of those deals where you can be almost cleared, but is it in your best interest right now to let it heal for a little bit longer? So, I think as we sit there and we talk, our medical people are so elite at this. It’s not can he go, but what’s in his best interest, I think we’re probably going to sit Sqwirl for a little bit longer and see what happens. Because Sqwirl is so dynamic, when he comes back I want him to come back and be healthy and have a great career. Connor was available on Saturday, I think now he would be hopefully full-go this week and be getting closer and closer to 100 percent.”

***On the team staying pretty healthy…***

“I think that’s one of the stories for this season is we’ve had some injuries, obviously, Clay being a devastating one, and some other guys. But, we’ve been a pretty healthy team. And I think a lot of that credit goes to Matt (Kuehl) in the training room and Ryan (Ross) and Dalis (Boyette) and Andrew Althoff and Jeremy Scott and Kent Johnston. We’ve really invested here in not just medical, but sports science and recovery and return to play. Althoff’s not here, but I think we had 20 guys run over 19 mph. This is the first year we’ve kept track of that. This is the first year that the amount of guys running 19 mph is actually going up as the season goes on, as opposed to going down. And we still practice the way we practice. So, I think it’s been a collective thing. I’m saying that as an aside. But, I think Connor should be available as we head into this week.”

***On if Chris Miller will be back after sitting out the game for targeting…***

“Chris Miller is back for this game. We’re going to practice tomorrow him not hitting quarterbacks as they slide. It’s hard, because two times he’s hit them high. So, I said (to the officials), what should we do, guys? Teach him to hit lower. So, he goes to go hit lower and the guy slides. We have this term now, late slide. You can’t hit a quarterback if he slides, but if it’s a late slide then you can.

But, I’ll tell you this: There’s not a person I challenged more when I got here than Chris Miller, day-in and day-out. And if you think I challenged him, you should meet Phil Snow challenging him. He has become one of the great leaders on our team, outstanding player. I could not be prouder of Chris Miller last week. He went to the scout team. I don’t go work out in the morning like those guys do, but Coach Snow shows up Friday morning. We have a 6 a.m. lift group for all the redshirts and the guys who aren’t traveling. Chris Miller’s in there. Here’s our starting free safety who’s going to get drafted, and he’s in there lifting with the freshmen because he’s not traveling. One of the first texts I got after the game was from Chris Miller. It’s an adversity that he didn’t get the chance to play; gave JT (Woods) and some of the other guys a chance to play more But, I think Chris is going to come back this week really, really appreciative of the chance to go out there and play with his teammates and his brothers. And sometimes, you don’t know what you have until it’s taken away from you, but I was so proud of the way he handled last week. I think he’ll be great this week.”

***On handling higher expectations and each game being bigger and bigger…***

 “I think they’ve embraced the 1-0 mindset because the outside importance on each game is only there if you win the previous ones, so it only stacks upon each other. But, I think it’s coming from the players. The fact that we can win and they can still not be satisfied is unbelievable and it’s hard to do. And as a coach, it keeps me in check. Sometimes, I come in like, ‘Hey, we won. And that was a hard game.’ And the guys are saying, ‘We need to do this better.’ I think that comes from the Sam Tecklenburgs and the Jordan Williams and the JaMycal Hastys and the Chris Platts and Denzel Mims and Blake Lynch, all those seniors that I was talking about. I think those guys are just really setting the bar high, and they’ve done it week-in and week-out. We had a level of intensity for UTSA that allowed this game to matter. If you don’t beat UTSA, then this game doesn’t really matter. I think they’ve handled that. And I think the thing that we’ve had to learn is when you’re a good team, people are going to do different things to you.”

***On game planning…***

“I like to talk football with (former Baylor QB and now Associate AD for Major Gifts) Nick Florence and talk about the offense they ran and the defense and how they did things before. Nick would always talk about how they would go into a game and there would be a game plan and then all of a sudden there would be a completely different defense. So, all of a sudden, he’s on the sideline with the coaches and they’re saying, ‘Let’s do this, let’s do that,’ and adjusting. And I think that’s what we’ve had to do both on offense and defense, people coming out and just doing completely different things, even on special teams. And our guys understand now that you’re not done with the game plan on Thursday. You’re done with the game plan when the clock hits zero. You’re learning through the game. And (defensive coordinator) Phil Snow was saying that to the team in 2017, it just took till now for the guys to understand that we’ve got to learn through the game. We’ve got to adjust to the things that happen in-game if we want to get better and better and better. That’s where I think the maturity of our team is showing.”