

# Baylor University Football Media Conference

Saturday, September 23 2017  
Waco, Texas

## Matt Rhule Press Conference

MATT RHULE: I appreciate everybody coming and being here. Obviously extremely disappointed for our kid that's we lost that football game. What a great football game it was. Lot of credit to OU. Thought that they made a tremendous amount of plays. I thought their backs were outstanding, and I thought that Baker Mayfield made some key plays when he needed to.

As all great teams do, they made the final plays down the stretch and found a way to win the football game.

I'd be remiss if I didn't thank our crowd. I thought they were fantastic, inspiring, and I think they showed our players just how valued they are.

So as I told our team, I'm proud of our team, but it doesn't mean I'm not angry about the game. I want to make it very clear. We didn't play above our capabilities. We have not played to our capabilities yet. We're going to continue to get better, continue to get better. Obviously there are some things on defense, especially in terms of stopping the run that were disappointing and have to get corrected, and we'll continue to work on those.

Proud of a couple guys. Maurice Porter who is probably one of our best or our best offensive lineman got hurt early on. Josh Malin had to step in and I thought did a tremendous job. Chris Platt got hurt and some other guys had to step in and in rotation. Thought Stricklin was great doing that. Two more freshman started tonight, and Xavier Newman started on the offensive line, and Rodney, R.J. Sneed started at receiver. So proud of the young guys. They had a chance to see what a tremendous Big 12 game can be. And Zach Smith stood in there and competed at a super high level. With that, I'll see what questions you have.

### **Q. Did you see what you were waiting to see, even though you didn't win the game?**

MATT RHULE: I think we saw it offensively. Defensively we saw some of it last week. It will be like



anything else. We'll go in there and see what we're one or two plays away from defense, one or two stops on defense. One or two not letting their backs run right through us and down the sideline. We just have a little bit more belief left until we make those plays.

But, you know what? I think one thing you have to say is you're seeing progress from week to week. My only goal is before you can win, you have to play winning football. Penalties were way down. We didn't beat ourselves. So I just think you see growth and you see movement forward. Once it fully clicks, we'll have the opening kickoff ask go back 70 yards is not what we wanted, but you know what? They rallied. So I think you see that the kids have heart and they're growing up and getting better in front of us.

### **Q. Just the fact that you had the one turnover there (Inaudible)?**

MATT RHULE: It was good. Really you're going to see defensively we're going to have a lot of those big plays when guys make a mistake. For me, I know I don't have great sound bites, but it's complete and total commitment to the process of playing well. The told them going into the game, if we play better than OU, we'll win the game. If we don't, we won't win the game.

So there were a lot of great plays they made. And one of our kids made the decision not to do what they're supposed to do.

We coached them really hard tonight. The last couple weeks we were like hang in there. Tonight we got after guys. Demanded they did their jobs, demanded that they did these things. And I said to them, it's time to grow up. This is what these games feel like. We're one stop away from having a chance. The but I am proud of their growth.

As anything, when you win or lose, you're proud of what you're doing better, and you have to also be honest about what you're not doing well.

### **Q. Denzel made some of those catches -- you kept talking about make a contested catch. Looked like Denzel had that kind of game today?**

MATT RHULE: Yeah, we challenged the receivers this week. We really challenged the receivers this week, and I thought they came through. You know, Platt to

make those plays and Platt to get hurt, and then for other guys to step up, and Denzel just jumped up and made some tremendous plays. I'd still like to get the run game going a little bit more.

But I think you just saw true championship effort from a lot of guys. The quarterback found a way to put the ball where he needed to be with those guys.

**Q. (Inaudible) scored and made it 14-7. How much did that change your attitude on the sidelines where guys felt like they could win?**

MATT RHULE: I told them last night. I hate to say this, but I said, I know how these games go, guys. They'll get up 7-0. Take the opening kickoff back. They'll get up 14-0 and we'll fight back. When they scored, I said I told you it was going to be like this.

We just want our kids to understand you don't win the game in the first quarter. You don't win the game in the second quarter. So I thought our kids did a tremendous job of fighting back. You know, fighting back from adversity. You know, so I thought that early -- against Duke had an early touchdown, and we had to feel good about ourselves and then we get hit. So for us to be down and had to fight back, that's where our team needs to grow up.

**Q. Did that give you a glimpse to be able to show (Inaudible) the whole offense, the receivers in particular, when you make some of those catches, how this can help the rest of the offense work together?**

MATT RHULE: I think they felt bad. I think they were out there recognizing that we don't beat ourselves. When we convert on third down -- I don't know what third down was here -- or I don't know, probably in the 40%. But we were able to convert on third down and when we were able to make those big plays. But also to make routine plays. To get us to 2nd and 6, I think they saw how that unlocked everything else. So they challenged and they responded. So I'm proud of our receiving corps.

**Q. What about the way you guys even fought to the end there? You're down 18. You got yourselves back in the game.**

MATT RHULE: Yeah, you know, I just think the offensive kids had a great, you know, believe that they could continue to move the football. I thought Connor Martin came up big. He missed that first field goal and came back and made some good field goals. We went on-side kick and for our defense to get the stop, that was vital.

I thought Nixon called a great game. I thought some of those last play calls, Coach Glenn Thomas, Bick, I

thought they all had good ideas in crucial situations. And really Zach executed. He put the ball where he needed to be.

**Q. Your offensive line, I know you got hit a lot, but your offensive line with what you have, how did they gel tonight and what was your difference in opinion, especially with the injuries?**

MATT RHULE: I think Malin has been waiting for his opportunity. Xavier Newman, think about it, Xavier Newman hasn't starred ever. He's played one series, I think. And Malin practices half the time at tight and half the time at tackle. So for those guys to go out there, just think we called a good game in terms of getting them the right things.

We're still not running the football at the level we need to, but they're fighting, they're trying, and they're competing. That's all we can ask right now.

So to throw the ball that many times, 60 times, you're going to get hit a few times. So I wish we would have been a little bit better down the stretch in crucial situations.

To be honest, we're a dropped touchdown and another missed field goal away from really being in the game. So there were opportunities everywhere. I don't want it painted one side. All of us are going to go in tomorrow and say, boy, if only. If only this would have happened, if only that would have happened, and that's football. That's why you work so hard so you can hopefully minimize the mistakes that you make.

**Q. (Inaudible)?**

MATT RHULE: You know, we weren't really -- because they were in that odd front had to run the ball outside a little bit more. Would have liked to have played them a little bit more, but once the game became that kind of a passing game didn't see any sense in wearing him out. He's back. He's got some carries, he did some good things, and we'll hopefully be able to get -- we play Kansas State and we have a bye week, and hopefully some of our team can get healed up. We took some injuries tonight and they're going to take a toll. So hopefully we can get ourselves healed up and go on that seven-game stretch.

**Q. When will you have the report?**

MATT RHULE: The doctors will usually let me know something tomorrow. They'll take him to the hospital. I don't know very much about him right now, to be honest.

**Q. Just the performance of Zach tonight having to throw the ball that many times?**

MATT RHULE: I thought he was quick, decisive, got the

ball where he needed to be. I thought he was brave. Thought he ran the ball when he had to. I don't think he threw a pick, right? No interceptions? No. He didn't turn the ball over. We didn't turn the ball over. We had a chance to win the game.

**Q. Could a performance like this, even without the win, allow that locker room to understand how close they are to winning against one of the elite teams or any team in this conference?**

MATT RHULE: Well, I really think -- because you're not there with us every day, people ask, how do they still believe. I'm telling you, this week was way easier to coach than the first week. So every week there's been more and more guys saying, "What do I need to do?" "What do I need to do, Coach?" So as much as I'd like to have beaten Liberty, and UTSA and all those people, I was driving through downtown Waco yesterday and they had the memorial, and it has the quote, "from adversity comes truth," never has a statement been more apropos in my life.

So as we've gone through this valley, we keep asking ourselves what is God teaching us? What is the coach teaching us? What am I supposed to learn from all this?

So I think they've really grown anyway. So now they see, you know what? We've gotten this close. It's still going to be the same things that cause us to lose against UTSA that caused us to lose today. The guy forgetting, oh, I have him. The guy scores the touchdown. The guy has the A-gap, and that's not to be negative. We coach it better, we get better, and we recognize that so many of the kids out there playing are going to be playing for a long time. They're going to go up next year and playing UT and playing at Kansas State, and playing all these games week in and week out, and to do it, we can't beat ourselves.

**Q. I mentioned Nixon and Glenn Thomas, did anything change tonight in how they were relaying information out on the field?**

MATT RHULE: No, Jeff called the game. Guys give solutions and questions. I shut up a little bit more and I tried to be quiet tonight.

I just think what we did last week, we just said to ourselves we're going to scale back a little bit on what we're doing, and make it really user friendly. Really challenge the players to go make plays. Like my lovely wife over here had the receivers over to our house on Thursday night. You know, this team's just a great group of kids. That's why I'm disappointed. I really wanted to win the game for them.

But, you know what, from adversity comes truth. We'll

learn more about ourselves and about our team, and we'll come back next week and get better. I just want them to keep believing in the process more and more and more.

And I'll say this, because it's important that I say some of these things because I know our kids are watching these. We were able to stay in this game because kids on our scout team like Will Jones and James Lockhart, they competed all week. I thought our team was much more ready to play this week than they have been.

**Q. They talk about the play of Taylor Young, he was outstanding?**

MATT RHULE: Yeah, he was passionate in the locker room. I kept subbing in for him, and he kept getting back on the field, you know. I just think he so badly wants to play at a high level and wants to see his teammates play at a high level. It's always hard without seeing the tape. But I saw a bunch of plays where he flew around and made tackles and made plays on the quarterback. I think we had him at 33% on third down early in the games.

You take away a couple early. One of the things, we're going through that phase on defense where it's like just a run of bad plays. We settle down and play really well for a while. Couple more runs of bad plays. As we get more mature and more experienced, we hope we can eliminate those runs or at least shorten them.

**Q. Those big plays you gave up, are those all fixable?**

MATT RHULE: Yeah, everything's fixable, yeah. I want to make sure I don't take credit away from them. I thought their receivers and tight ends made some unbelievable plays on deep balls on man coverage. One ball down the left sideline, and then later on in the game, I thought Harrison made a couple plays.

I thought Phil did a good job adjusting and not playing quite as much man so they didn't have the easy one-on-one shots. I thought we went into our three-down stuff hoping to give them some different looks. Like the other day, they made big, powerful runs and threw some tackles at crucial times.

**Q. These guys continuing to believe, (Inaudible)?**

MATT RHULE: My whole focus, and the reason why I'm able to just be me is because I only worry about the things that I can control. I 100% care about what my players think and process and what my family thinks. That being said, I always recognize when people are there for you. I thought our crowd tonight was passionate. It was inspiring to walk off the field to that.

That being said, like we're going to go on the road. I thought our crowd last week was amazing in Durham.

So when you go through these things that we're going through right now, sometimes it really teaches you to know what's important. The people that truly love you and care for you and have your back, and the people that were standing up there at the Bear Walk today, the people that send me notes and walk by and walk up to me and are positive and positive to our kids, that's what family is.

Lot of guys ask me this week, why should people come to the game? Because it was a good football game. It was a good football game. Wish we would have won it. Wish I would have been able to do a little more to help our kids win it. But as I said, that to me is a team everyone should support and get behind.

You know what? We'll continue to go like this at times. It's our job to keep pushing them. To play at the highest level we can play. Let me make this very clear, people are going to pat them on the back and say, hey, that was a great game. Not good enough. And not for Baylor to have moral victories. I don't care if we're young. I don't care if we're hurt. I don't care. We're going to continue to get better and go play a great Kansas State team next week and see if we can't compete against them at a high level.

**Q. Impressions of Tay Young and Grayland back in the secondary?**

MATT RHULE: We don't normally wear the head set. I know it's hard to believe. Coach is pretty intense on the head set. I haven't heard him talking about Harrison in two weeks. Seems like he's playing at a high level. Seems he's coming around. Grayland made those plays down the sideline where the one guy got positioned out and caught the ball.

But we have to fight for some balls. We're going to give up deep balls in this league. It's hard to see the safety play. We rotate a lot of guys through. But we'll watch the film and like everything else, there will be some good things, some bad things and we're never going to be happy giving up 50 points. We're never going to be okay with that. We're going to continue to work until we're a really good defense.

**Q. (Inaudible) talk about the process. You say your team's fine and everything. But there was one point in this game where it felt like your team truly believed it (Inaudible).**

MATT RHULE: Well, I think even being down 14-0 I think they showed it. I guess my only point here is I felt that each week. The first week we're in the hotel and I'm yelling about putting our phones away. Now I'm the last one to chat. I'm the last one and everyone's down there. So I think they're understanding the link between doing what you're supposed to do and

believing in the people around you and how it relates to football. These lessons are hard, but when you learn them, you learn them for life. So I'd rather learn them now.

But I'm proud of them. They come out to work every day. They're hurting in there, but they have each other's back.

There has never been more of a sense of team than there was in there just now. So I'm very proud of that. We also have to get better as a football team. But they are certainly -- I wouldn't say they did buy in. But they're definitely trying to buy in. It's just hard to learn to do something new. But when you learn it, you learn it for life.

**Q. (Inaudible)?**

MATT RHULE: He got hurt on the first drive, so maybe an ankle. Xavier Jones went down with a lower leg injury, so we had some guys really go down. The medical report, you know I care greatly about those players, so hopefully they're all okay. We'll see. But it looked like some of them were severe.



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## Taylor Young Press Conference

TAYLOR YOUNG: We still have a long way to go, but our team's getting better each week. So hopefully things just keep on blowing up.

**Q. Coach talks about trusting the process and getting better week by week. You guys on film from week one to now have made a tremendous amount of improvement. Could you see it yourself, and also talk about when you guys took the lead, the crowd went berserk. Could you feel the electricity in the air?**

TAYLOR YOUNG: Yes, the crowd was great tonight. It was just like -- I mean we always preach every day in practice just every little detail, all the small details will end up coming together in the end. So just having that crowd out there was great.

But it was just, it's all about us. It's all about what the team's going to do and what the team can do. Everybody who looks to the left and looks to the right, and we're all brothers. That's definitely how it goes every day in practice. That's where it starts though.

**Q. At the end of the day, how disappointing is it to get that close and know you guys have a chance to get to the number three team in the country after the way the season kind of started for you?**

TAYLOR YOUNG: It's disappointing, but at the same time as a team and as a captain, I can't just be sad about it. Like we've really got to keep pushing because it is a young team, and we're steady getting better. I'm just proud of all the guys that played. Like a whole bunch of guys came back today, so it just shows what type of energy those guys bring.

So just having everybody back and getting better, having that right there, like that unit, you know what I mean? Just having them back and just having like guys fly around, it was great, but we still have to get better.

**Q. Taylor, how important is it to have nights like tonight where you don't like the outcome, but you**



**guys know the process is working. You're getting better on a weekly basis as opposed to different sort of outcomes?**

TAYLOR YOUNG: I mean, it's tough, you know. It's tough. Just because our record isn't really what it needs to be. But just having those guys out there, showing some fight, even though at a point we were down 18, we still fought back. I mean, it was just a great feeling to see those guys fighting. I'd love to go to war with those guys any day of the week.

**Q. Taylor, Zach comes in, he's getting hit. But that dude was fighting all night.**

TAYLOR YOUNG: Slinging it, slinging it. I was proud of him. It really showed in practice what he did. You know, just really just being accountable and just in practice he had that intense look in him. Every day he was focused in. He was locked in. So I'm proud of him because it just showed. Like I knew he was going to ball out this week and it just showed every day in practice.

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## Zach Smith Press Conference

ZACH SMITH: I think everybody can see we lost week one here in the same stadium, and we came back and had the ball to get down and score. Couldn't really get it done, but that was an exhilarating game. It was really fun. It really shows us who we are and how great we can be. So we have to keep up the momentum.

### **Q. Where's the line between liking where you guys are heading but being disappointed in the loss?**

ZACH SMITH: Yeah, obviously we're disappointed to lose. I think we had some really great things in that game. O-line stepped up, defense stepped up. You know, receivers really, really stepped up. Backs played good. So, yeah, we're sad that we lost. We're happy to see some new things, but we're hungry. We're hungry to go out and move on and play K-State next week.

### **Q. Does the loss make it even hungrier?**

ZACH SMITH: Absolutely, yeah.

### **Q. Offensive line struggled early on still. Kind of a work in progress with moving parts. But today it looks like they gave you more time. How much did that spark you guys?**

ZACH SMITH: I think that helped a ton. We've still got to get better in the run game, which I think is coming. But O-line played their butts off. Porter went down early, first quarter or something like that. Josh Malin came in and played a great game. He played a great game. O-line for the most part had an outstanding game. So can't give enough praise to them. Without them, I couldn't be able to sit back and deliver the ball.