Baylor Football Head Coach Matt Rhule
Weekly Press Conference
September 23, 2019

***Opening Statement***

“I appreciate the crowd, appreciate everybody being here today to support both football and the athletic department. Really excited this week, have our Big 12 Conference opener. Excited to get back home. Proud of our guys for finding a way to get through the non-conference schedule 3-0, thought we had some good moments, some bad moments, some things on Saturday we obviously want to learn from, but in the end they found a way to get it done, found a way to come home 1-0 last week and I know our focus is squarely now on Iowa State and our Big 12 opener. Great football team lead by a great coach and a great staff, a great quarterback and a great defense and so we know we certainly have our work cut out for us, but we’re excited for the opportunity, we’re excited to play in such a relevant game so early in the season and we’re going to do our best to play our best football.”

***On where the team can improve…***

“Well, we have to run the football better. We were beyond deficient on Saturday and maybe it doesn’t show up in the yardage quite as much, but when we needed to get it, it’s one thing to run the ball on jet sweeps and things to get some free yardage, but you have to go to run the ball when everyone knows you have to run the ball if you want to be a good team and we weren’t able to run it on third and one, weren’t able to run it on fourth and one. We were outnumbered at the point of attack and couldn’t make a guy miss so I’m really disappointed to be quite honest in the offensive line play, the tight end play which to me falls back on our o-line coach, our tight end coach, and our head coach. That’s how I look at those things and I know that’s how our coaches feel and we took that very personally on Saturday so we have to improve there. On defense you know we’re just not doing a great job on third down. You know we’re 44 percent right now, we’re not getting off the field and we’re still not creating the turnovers we’d like to, we knocked four balls out on Saturday and came away with one and so we’ve made a lot of progress but I would say run the football on offense and then getting off the field on third down on defense and creating turnovers are the areas that we have to improve and improve quickly especially against Iowa State.”

***On the play of the offensive line…***

“Well, they made a decision, Rice did, to outnumber the box, to utilize line movement and you know I think we took advantage of them at times by throwing the football, which you have to do, but you also want to find a way to run it and I don’t think we were diverse enough in the things that we did, we didn’t win the blocks when we had them, we didn’t win the blocks in the perimeter, we just didn’t play as well as we need to so and we didn’t run the ball well the week before so we have to just get back to our fundamentals but mainly into our mindset you know our mindset has to be ‘Hey we’re going to find a way to run,’ we have good receivers, we can run and we have a good quarterback. If we can run the football with the great backs that we have then we become a much more difficult team to defend and so that’ll be our focus this week.”

***On what the team worked on Sunday to correct things…***

“Yes, so we watched the film as a team together and I thought that they identified the issues where they were and most importantly you know when you’re watching from the outside it’s always like the what. ‘What are they doing here? Why are they doing this? Why are they doing that?’ and there’s some merit to that, but we really believe in our program that players win games and so we saw a lot of opportunities where we could’ve just maybe played a little better and made some big plays and so I think the biggest thing is if a game like that happens and you learn from it, if you take responsibility for your play, if you come back then you have a chance to be good and I thought our guys as a team recognized that ‘Hey this isn’t the way we want to play.’ We weren’t even, when we were getting tackled, we weren’t even running over there and helping the back up, we were just kinda going back to the line of scrimmage, kinda going through the motions and I usually don’t even talk to this in depth about the things that were wrong, but I’m saying it because we need to identify it, correct it. My wife comes to me and said ‘Boy, your sideline was dead.’ I mean just, you know, it just wasn’t what we wanted, but at the end of the day like I said the mission is to go 1-0 every week. Above the mission, we have a standard. We didn’t play to our standard, but we did find a way to go 1-0 so hopefully we learn from it, hopefully we have a much better week this week.”

***On what it means now that the players are taking responsibility…***

“ That’s a good sign, but I do believe in life you can either learn from wisdom or experience right so if you’re a smart team you listen, you pay attention to the signs, you listen, learn from others, we told them all week ‘Hey guys this is going to be a fight.’ Rice did not like the way they played, I listened to their head coach in his press conference and the sound that his voice. They’re not going to lay down for ya and I stayed out on that field after that game and shook every player’s hand that I could and I told them ‘You guys are going to win a lot of games if you guys just keep doing what you did.’ So I’m glad we learned from it on Sunday, we just got to learn from it on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, we need to anticipate those things, but I knew this was going be the hardest week of the year, I really believed that, our kids are excited about the conference and all that, we have four great games coming up in a row, challenges, contests, I knew Saturday was going be something that was hard and we got through it.”

***On Charlie’s leadership…***

“Yeah, I mean, like I said, the same thing, all those things are after the game you know what I mean like I just want to see those things during the week. For me like I came back on Sunday, we met with the team and I’m on Iowa State, I was like ‘Let’s go. Let’s learn from this.’ You can learn from wisdom, but usually you learn from experience and so we recognize now, I think a lot of guys recognize that we have to practice at a high level, we have to prepare at a high level

I think a lot of guys recognize that we have to prepare at a high level, we have to travel at a high level and do every part of the process at a high level. It can’t be coach Rhule, it can’t be coach Snow saying, ‘hey guys, pay attention to the details.’ That being said, I have to say that our defense played really, really well. I know we are such an offensive minded place, but the defense, Clay [Johnston] and Chris Miller, I am so proud of Clay Johnston. He was out there yelling, ‘Let’s go!’ and he is not a real fiery guy, but we had a chance to go win the game on defense and we did. I think there were a lot of good things, just the offense in the second half wasn’t very good.”

***On the play of the defense vs. Rice…***

“The defensive line and the linebackers played really, really well. They got into the backfield and disrupted. The quarterback run hurt us, and that’s another issue this week with Purdy, he is such a good quarterback but also dual threat runner. Really two weeks in a row we have seen this quarterback zone read, skimmers coming around, but I thought our d-line played really well.”

***On the play of James Lockhart…***

“I thought he was dominant. To the point where, they hand us an iPad and we can watch the game on the ride home, we didn’t get to our house until 3, so I was watching it on the bus and I usually let the players sleep, but I had to call Lock and tell him that he played beautifully. He was physical, he hustled, he ran to the ball, he got his hand on balls, recovered a fumble, he pressured the quarterback. I think the biggest thing about James is that he is like so many of our young people, he was putting so much pressure on himself in that redshirt year and really even last year that, ‘I have got to be this. I was recruited like this, I have to be this.” And he put that all away, finally, and said how can I transform myself and he turned himself into a tough, rugged, physical, hard playing guy with a lot of ability. He stopped worrying about the result and just started worrying about the process. He is one of our strongest guys, he is one of our most competitive guys and I thought having him along with [James] Lynch at times is dominant, Bravvion [Roy] at times is dominant, to have Lock join them, I thought we had three guys play dominant football on Saturday.”

***On Iowa State…***

“Well, first of all, we talk about Iowa State, you have to talk about them globally as a team. We talk about process here, but Coach Campbell when he was at Toledo and now at Iowa State, he is a process-oriented coach. And those are dangerous teams because they go out there and control the things they can control and work hard. This Iowa State team, they never beat themselves. They find a way to win the game within the game, and then they are a well-coached team. I think Coach Heacock, their defensive coordinator is one of the best in the country. And the defensive stats bear that out. They have great players on defense. [Greg] Eisworth is their middle safety, kind of like our Chris Miller who plays that same position for us and he is a dominant player who can defend the pass, come up on the run. They have Joshua Bailey their nose tackle and [Ray] Lima is just a fantastic player. They have great players all across the board on defense. They tackle, they get off blocks and Coach Heacock keeps you off balance, they always have something new for you, something different for you. They will pressure you, they will max drop. And offensively, Brock Purdy is a special player. He has really developed from last year to this year. He hurt us last year. We couldn’t tackle him. He ran around and converted third downs and made big plays. You look at him this year and he has really developed into a true timing passer. It’ll be a tremendous challenge across the board, one that I hope we are ready for.”

***On Iowa State QB Brock Purdy…***

“Just like I said, I think he has tremendous instincts. He is a tremendous scrambler, he can push things down the field. They are using him as more of a runner as well, they are running zone read, with guys coming around to block for him. I think the biggest thing is his true timing passing game is really elite right now. [Charlie] Kolar the tight end, he can get up in the seams and run routes, they have speed on the outside, a tremendous slot in [Tarique] Milton who can do a lot of things. He is taking throws that they give him, but he can also make the hard throws. He is really playing good football. They played a ULM team on Saturday that lost to Florida State the week before by an extra point and hung 700 yards on them, 72 points and were dominant. There is a lot of work to be done on our end defensively.”

***On last year’s game at Iowa State…***

“Last year was a hard-fought, tough football game. They were fighting to get into the conference championship, we were fighting to be bowl eligible. It was minus 15 degrees there and the place was packed. It was loud, it was really a credit to their fan base. Two teams that were pushing hard down the stretch and unfortunately that play happened and after it happened, I know how remorseful Greg [Roberts] was. They are a team that we have a lot of respect for and this is all about football to me. If all these other things matter to you, then you will miss the football and Brock Purdy will pump fake and run around you. We are just focused on football and this really good team we are going to play.”

***On team physicality…***

“I think we are a pretty physical team. We weren’t necessarily on the offensive line on Saturday but I think defensively we played hard and physical. I think we are just going to have to go play. I think that is one of those questions I will have to answer after the game on Saturday. So much of physicality is mindset. We have a chance to be as physical as any team in the country when our mindset is right. I thought we were unbelievably physical on defense on Saturday. Some guys played 60 snaps on defense. There were no easy plays. There were no bubble screens on Saturday, those were 60 hard ball, double team, down block reps and I thought our guys answered the call. I hope that we will be ready on Saturday as well.”

***On the team’s playmakers…***

“We have good players, a lot of guys who can make things happen, a lot of guys who can carry the football. I think Jeff [Nixon] has called great games and gotten the ball on the perimeter, even that call to [Josh] Fleeks to get him the ball on the perimeter and I think our quarterbacks have made good decisions. One of the things that we wanted to do coming out of game was we didn’t want it to be Mims-centric in terms of the explosive plays, so to have [Chris] Platt run 4.2 down the middle of the field and catch that ball, to have Tyquan [Thornton] get behind people, to have that many big plays happen by other guys, I think that gives Charlie [Brewer] confidence that not every deep ball needs to go to Denzel [Mims]. We can get the ball on the outside to others and hope now that defenses have to say, because they were doubling [Denzel] Mims in the second half the other night, Tyquan [Thornton] can run, Platt can run, if we get Marques [Jones] back he can definitely run, [RJ] Sneed can run, so we have other guys that can be dynamic, so that was the hope coming out of that game.”

***On Bloomgren saying he wanted to pattern what he does at Rice around what Rhule has done at Temple and Baylor…***
“I’m probably so caught up in just today, I don’t pay too much attention to it. I just have a lot of respect for what Coach Bloomgren is doing. I know how hard it is to kind of start where he started and where we started. And at the end of the day, the results don’t always speak to the progress. He has a team that’s played four tough, tough games. They’ve made a lot of progress from last year. The results just don’t say it yet, they will. It’s the same thing for us. Even after the game, that’s why I was kind of at peace. We’re going to go back and watch the film. Just because you won or lost doesn’t mean you’re a good team or not. So, go back and watch the tape and get ready for this game.”

***On what are people saying about Baylor at this point…***

“I hope they see a disciplined team, a team with a lot of talent. I’m sure they see all of our weaknesses, too. They see a team that’s had a hard time protecting the quarterback, running the football, getting the ball out. But, I hope they also see the good things well. We’re covering kicks well, we’re playing special teams well. We’re like everyone else early in the season. Everyone is a work in progress. Look at the scores, look at the scores in our own conference. There are 10 teams in the Big 12, only three are undefeated right now. It’s difficult to win in college football. We don’t even know what we are yet. And I say that because you don’t know who you are until that Saturday, and then you’re only that for that Saturday. That doesn’t carry over. We’re going to go try to be as good as we can be this Saturday. And then win, lose or draw, we’re going to get ready to go play Kansas State. And then the same thing week after week after week. That’s the fun thing, though, about being in the conference. You know that every game is going to be a fight. You know you have a chance every week, the other team has a chance, you have to go play your best football. Got through the non-conference, now we can head to conference, and I can’t think of a harder, tougher test than Iowa State, just because the level they do things at is so high.”

***On expecting an elite crowd for the game Saturday…***

“I want to make sure I say it again, Iowa State’s crowd last year was elite. I come from Penn State where rain, shine, you show up and you go watch them play. And I’m expecting that. I thought our student section last game – it was 104, it was 181 on the turf, and those students stayed out there till the very end. To me, I only worry about the football. I don’t care what happens other than that. I need to get the football right. I just hope for Baylor people, this is what you wanted. Two years ago, we were a little bit on the brink. And here we are two years and three games, and ESPN is coming to town, and it’s a big game. It’s just a big game, it’s a relevant game. We’re 3-0, they’re 2-1, and they’re in the top 30, they get top-25 votes, we haven’t. It’s a big game. It will be hot, it will be whatever, but you know what, it will be a great game and it will be a tremendous atmosphere. So, I certainly hope that the fans will come out. Not because it will maybe make us play better, but I hope that they come out for them. I hope that our students certainly because our students are awesome, and I want our students to have a true college experience. I hope I look up there and I see nothing but gold all across that stadium. I hope that when people turn on the TV they see what it means to be a Baylor Bear. That means that we come out and we support each other, and we are united in big, big moments like this. And I think all of our home games the rest of the year are going to be big, big moments. They’re going to be hard-fought games, and we’ll need everyone there to make it a great experience. My job, and our team’s job, is to make sure we play well. Reward those people that come by playing well, play the game the right way. We’re going to have ourselves ready, I hope the crowd is ready, I hope it’s loud, raucous, fun. That’s why you come to college, that’s why you support your teams, so that you can have those elite experiences. This should be a great experience on Saturday.”