Baylor Football Head Coach Matt Rhule
Weekly Press Conference
September 30, 2019

***Opening Statement***

“As always, every week, great to see you, appreciate guys being here and covering our team. I’m going to make a brief statement about the contract extension. You know both Julie [Rhule] and I are extremely grateful to Dr. Livingstone and really all of the Baylor administration for this opportunity to stay at Baylor and continue to build on what we started and really just to the entire university since we’ve been here and the entire community of Waco, people have welcomed us and done nothing but help us get the program moving in the right direction so we’re grateful for that and then excited about the opportunity for many, many more years. Just on a personal note, you know these decisions, you know as you talk about where you’re going to live with your family and all the things are hard, I always look at life not in terms of places but in terms of people and partnerships and the football program, the athletic department would not be where it is without Mack Rhoades and he has tremendous vision, but he also grinds it out. He’s one of the few athletic directors in the country that’s there before the football coaching staff and stays later than they do so I just felt like when you have to bet on yourself you want to bet on the people around you and I think that we’ll do great things here on and off the field with Dr. Livingstone, with the entire university and most certainly with Mack. Also, I want to make sure I thank Jeramiah Dickey who’s the Associate Vice President for Intercollegiate Athletics who works with football and puts up with me so we’re just grateful for all those people. I want to make sure I thank our staff, guys have moved across the country and left high school jobs and come to Baylor on a vision and we’re not there yet but we’re getting there and I’m grateful to them, but most importantly I want to thank our players, especially some of the players that aren’t even here anymore. You know I was getting texts last night from Greg Roberts and those guys and it was those guys in that first year 2017 that made the decision to stay and battle through what was a tough season that has allowed us to have the small amount of success we’re having right now and I’m grateful to them more than you could know. I want to be at Baylor for many, many reasons but most importantly are the players because they’re special. And along with that, I’m almost done thanking people, are the players’ parents. I know what it’s like as a parent to send your kid off and all you want is for them to be successful and the one thing I’ve learned being a college football coach is if you want to end up being successful you quite often have to have some times of no success, you have to go through adversity so you learn how to deal with it and you become more refined on the other end and the only way a young person can do that without transferring, without quitting, without always feeling like everyone’s against them is if they have parents behind them, family members behind them, high school coaches behind them who trust in the coaching staff and trust the process and a lot of the kids that we have, their families made the decision to send them here, they listened to our vision and they believed it. However, there were a lot of parents that inherited us, they had to trust coaches that they didn’t know and so I’m so grateful to the parents of our players because they’ve entrusted us with the most important thing in their lives which is their kids. I’m excited for the future, I’m excited for what we’ll get to and we’re not there yet, we have a lot of work to do but we’re going to keep grinding day in and day out to make this program one of the best college football programs in the country on and off the field. I’m committed to Baylor so I’m also committed to beating Kansas State so I’m going to transition to them.”

“What a great opportunity it is for us to play a team that was ranked up until last week, went to Starkville, beat Mississippi State, played a hard fought game against Oklahoma State on the road and we know it’ll be a battle in every sense of the word. Coach [Chris] Klieman’s come in, he’s a winner, he’s a national championship caliber coach, they’re playing great defense right now, one of the top passing defenses and third down defenses in the country, run the football, Skylar Thompson’s an elite quarterback that can hurt you with his arm or his feet and he certainly hurt us last year and as you look at their roster, there’s guys that we’ve played against and we know how tough, how physical they’ll be, what a challenge it’ll be on the road and so we have to play our best football. Saturday we were able to come away with a win, was a great game, a gritty game, a tough game but it certainly wasn’t a dominant game and it had a chance to be that and we didn’t do it and so as we sit here now you know we’ve played four games, my message to our players is very simple, we just have to get better. You know whether we’re 4-0 or 0-4 we’re not anywhere near where we want to be and so we have to just get better right now, we’re playing really hard and we’re playing really physical so you see a lot of good things happening, we’re sacking the quarterback, we’re starting to knock the ball out, we’re making big plays in the passing game but there’s a level of execution of everybody just kinda doing their job that isn’t really happening right now and it showed up in the fourth quarter that game where we let them back into it. So we’re going to get back to the basics this week, if you have a guy man to man just look at the guy, don’t look back at the quarterback and try to be a hero. If you’re supposed to be in the c gap, be in the c gap, everybody just go out and do their job, our issues are not talent, our issues are not toughness, it’s just really the discipline of execution and so that’ll come from the coaching staff, it’ll come from our veteran players and we have to make it happen. I’ll close this statement by saying this, the last play of that game was probably one of my favorite plays I’ve ever been a part of in football where Phil [Snow] brought a blitz and James Lockhart just trusted his training and he used a rip move which is all we tell him to do. He didn’t do something he saw on Twitter, he didn’t do a spin move, he just did a rip move, he reached his outside arm like he does every day in practice, he knocked the ball out and James Lynch saw the ball on the ground and James Lynch right now has four and a half tackles for loss and a couple sacks and a lot of kids would’ve picked that ball up and tried to go score a touchdown and James Lynch didn’t think about anything else other than his team and winning the football game and he dove on the football and we won the game and so I probably would’ve picked it up and tried to go score and James Lynch made it all about the team. He just went out there and had the discipline to execute and just do his job and so if we can continue to get that message across to our players, if the guys will come in and everybody just handle their business and do their job, I think maybe we have a chance to become a better team and we’ll have to do that this week to go to Manhattan and come away with a win so thank you for letting me have that long statement I’m sorry, but with that I’ll take your questions.”

***On the long-term impact of the contract extension…***

“Well, you know, I’m kind of a private person, I wouldn’t really want to put stuff out you know but I think the impact of it being released has two impacts and the biggest one to me is for our current players you know you can say what you want our current players are kind of walking around like you know in the back of their minds “Is this coaching staff going to be here?” Well, now they know we’re going to be here so let’s get to work, let’s get that out of the way and let’s make sure everybody’s going to class and everybody’s playing football and so I think that was really important for our players and then for recruiting I mean you know this is a great place and it’s not even necessarily that I’m going to be here and the staff’s going to be here it’s also that this is a destination place you know living in central Texas, living in Waco, being at Baylor University, the access to education, the access to world class facilities, elite sports all across the board from tennis to women’s basketball is a national championship caliber program, Scott Drew, everything here is the best of the best and so I hope it tells recruits that yeah, you know what, I’ll probably have other options, I’ve had other options, our coaching staff have had other options, we’re not forced to be here, we love to be here cause this is a great place and I want recruits to know that. They all have other options but if they come to Baylor it’ll be one of the best decisions of their life and I’ve now made that decision twice you know I made it the first time and I’ve made it now and so I hope that that is the message in recruiting.”

***On the changes to K-State with a new head coach…***

“You know, it’s the same, the ethos of the program is the same, they’re tough, they’re disciplined, they’re physical I mean literally the offensive line other than you know [Dalton] Risner are basically all the same guys you know they’re going to run the football, they’re gonna play great on special teams, they’re playing great defense so it’s all the same you know thing but they just do it in different ways you know the defense is different I mean Coach Klieman’s a defensive man by trade and you know they take away what you do well, they’re not afraid to play man I mean one of the stories for this game is you know we haven’t really defeated man coverage at the level we want, we had some big plays but play in and play out you know “Are we executing against those coverages?” and they’re going to come out and they’re going to play man, they’re going to get in our face, you know on our defense, their offense, we’ve gone to kind of a smaller defense you know we’ve had a lot of fast guys and they’re going to line up and they’re going to put tight ends and fullbacks, they have a 6’7 tight end, they got a bunch of big people and they’re going to go out there and they’re going to pound us and so it’ll be a challenge in every sense and so you know we’ll just have to get ready and play our best and like I said if everybody does their job at least it gives you a chance to play really well.”

***On the play of the defense…***

I think it is a work in progress. I think the biggest issue on defense is we have given up 65 points, 45 of those in the fourth quarter. That is antithetical to everything I believe in. That is a team thing, right? We are not running the ball, we can’t just control things in the fourth quarter to put the game away , so the run game and defense all goes hand in hand. But I think we have eliminated a lot of really big plays. We have been really good against the run. I thought Brock Purdy looked like Baker Mayfield on Saturday to be honest with you. He is a special player and that’s two years in a row. I love to win and to appreciate the beauty of the opponent and I thought he played fantastic. We really hit Brock Purdy on Saturday. We got after him with a lot of big hits and he just kept getting back up off the deck and was ready for the next play. I think we are getting after the ball a lot better, not at the level we want, we are getting to the quarterback a lot better. We are still giving up a lot of easy throws, just kinda free access, they are just throwing the ball out there. I think we are tackling better. I think there is a lot of things we are doing better, but there are just a lot of details, that sometimes when you start having success on defense guys start not worrying about that and they are just trying to make plays. We had a lot of guys in the fourth quarter just trying to make plays and the reality of it is when you try to make a play in football, what you end up doing is for the other team. You start trying to do something special and you do something special for the other team. And that showed up in the fourth quarter Saturday. So, we came in yesterday and it was a reality check for a lot of times. I better just do my job and trust my teammates. Still play hard, still play physical, but have the disciple to execute and just do your job.”

***On the thought that the team played good defense for three quarters but let it go in the fourth…***

“There were a lot of guys that I think thought we played great defense for three quarters and kind of let it go in the fourth quarter, but that is not real. That is what it feels like when you are out there, but that’s not real. That tight end that caught that ball, ran down to the three-yard line, he was open on that exact same play two series earlier. Just Clay [Johnston] or J Will [Jordan Williams] came off the edge and sacked the quarterback before he could throw it to him. So, we are playing with effort and playing with intensity, but we are not playing with discipline and the focus and the precision that we need to. It’s the same thing in the two-minute drive. We hit Tyquan [Thornton] on a curl wide open, well that same curl was open on third and six and two, but we are looking at the other side because we think Denzel [Mims] is open. Instead of just going out there and execute. That comes from the coaching staff and the leadership. If there is one thing I have to make sure we do right now, which tells us how far our seniors have come, I have to make sure we are having enough fun, because we are winning games and guys are going in and saying we have to get better. And that is a good thing, but you have to enjoy winning too. It’s a balance. I like where our heads are, we have to get a lot better this week because Kansas State does not give you a thing.”

***On the team continuing to block a lot of kicks…***

“That’s just one of the things we do. We talk about our brand, that is a thing we want to do, we want to block kicks. So, when you do it, it energizes you. It’s like this is what we do. Just like great dunkers, it’s their brand. So, we like to block kicks. So when we get one it’s a big deal to us. There’s another example. We teach the guys who aren’t coming to run to five yards and turn sideways and get their hands down like a shortstop in case the ball ever comes. And on that play they kind of jogged and stopped and looked at the play and the ball came right to us and we would have scored a touchdown but we weren’t ready. We weren’t doing our job. We just were kind of doing our job. And we all know people like that who kinda do their job and that is what we are doing as a football program right now. We are kinda doing our job. So we need to get the details back to where everyone is doing their job because the game is going to come down to the last play. If you believe the game is going to come down to the last play then every play could be the play that wins or loses the game if you do your job with that level of urgency every play. But I like our effort, I like our physicality. We have tried to put some of our younger, taller guys on the field goal block team a couple weeks ago and some of the older guys got really angry. And then we hadn’t blocked a few so they said put us back on it so we had some guys out there that were really giving great effort. Gabe Hall is one of the young guys who has really gone out there and it was fun to see those guys get it done and make a big play in the game. Because at the end of the day you look back and that play was one that changed the game.”

***On the growth and development of senior linebacker Jordan Williams…***

“The biggest growth I have seen is his maturity and attention to detail. And when I say maturity I don’t just mean as a person. He has been a great, great person all the way along. But his football maturity, the way he takes care of his body now, the way he prepares, the way he does extra. He hurt his ankle in preseason and Terrel [Bernard] went ahead of him and he didn’t complain, he was just like whatever I need to do. No one has bought into the process and come further to buy into the process than he has, which is why he represents us as a captain. And he has played a lot of really good football on Saturday. He has always had great instincts. We came in and watched him the year before we got here, he started against Oklahoma, you could tell he had great instincts. He has just added the physicality and the knowledge and the discipline to go on to of those instincts. And he has become a guy that, he called me, [John] Lovett was saying we needed to have a players’ only meeting. And this is Saturday night now, and I am an old man now, J Will [Jordan Williams] called me at 10:45 p.m. at night and I am falling asleep and when a player calls you on a Saturday night it is like, “Oh no, what can I do for you?” but he was saying, “Coach, we want to have a players only meeting to watch this tape and hold ourselves accountable.” So, lots of guy like to hold other guys accountable, but it’s the guys who hold themselves accountable first and allow others to hold them accountable and that is where J Will [Jordan Williams] has just skyrocketed. Now if you tell him, “Hey, you’re not doing this,” he doesn’t get defensive, he accepts it and that is what allows you to play good on defense. Because on offense, one guy can do something wrong and Denzel [Mims] can jump up and catch the ball and it doesn’t matter. But on defense, if one guy does something wrong, it can be six. So J Will [Jordan Williams] has really been a part of that cultural change here to make that be who we are and what we do.”

***On how much difference did it make plugging Xavier Newman into the OL…***

“About the same. I think Prince [Pines] was just getting a little overwhelmed and getting a little tired. And I thought X [Xavier Newman] went in there and he played well. if you know X [Xavier Newman], he knows he can play a lot better. So, I thought he did a nice job. He came to me early in the week and said, ‘Coach, I want to play this week.’ I thought having him out there, having [Jalen] Pitre out there, allowed us to be fresher and rotate. But, I think Prince really has a bright, bright future. I need him to come back this week. We’re playing against really big men this week at Kansas State, big, physical men. And Prince gives us a level of physicality that we need, so does X [Xavier Newman]. I thought the biggest thing that was fun about watching X play was he played so hard. He was trying to run guys to the ground, he was trying to knock guys down, he was trying to finish guys. He was playing our brand of football in the offensive line, which was fun.”

***On the mindset that the defense wants the game in its hands…***

“I thought in the Rice game, it came down to defense, and we told them to embrace it. And I thought Clay (Johnston) did a great job of embracing it for the defense and trying to get them into it. I went out there this week to the defense and said, ‘This is why last week happened, to prepare you for this week, so go attack it and embrace it.’ It’s still hard. You still always feel like when the offense isn’t playing well that we aren’t playing well. But, if you hold a team in the Big 12 scoreless through three quarters, you’re playing pretty well. Now, the message is, there’s still mistakes there, you can play even better. That’s the good news is you held a great team scoreless through three quarters and you can still play better. The scary part is you gave up 21 points in the fourth quarter, so obviously you have to play better. There’s a lot of things there that we have to improve upon, but I do like the fact that their mentality is hey, you know what, it doesn’t matter what’s happening on offense, we can win the game on defense and on special teams. Those defenders, they control two-thirds of the game, they play on defense and they play on special teams. Go win the game there.”

***On sending Gerry Bohanon in for two plays…***

“Charlie [Brewer] got struck really hard and was kind of wobbling around. I don’t know, when I see a guy out there, especially a quarterback, take a big hit, I don’t know if he has a concussion. So, I got him off the field. The shame of it was we probably should have had Charlie just go down so we could have the timeout and get the trainers out there, because Gerry got out there and we ran a play with like six seconds left on the clock. So, it probably was not handled right by us. But, we always have a package ready for Gerry. At the same time, Gerry can run our whole offense. We’ve all seen what Gerry can do. Charlie went down, he just didn’t look great, he got hit in the ribs, so we let Gerry go. And then when Charlie felt better, we got him back out there.”

***On if the team recognized that James Lynch’s play was that important for the team…***

“I showed it to the team. I showed them nine plays from the game. I showed them the third-and-10 where the quarterback sprinted out and threw the ball up in the air. Because all of our safeties that were deep came running up to the quarterback. And I showed them the same play happening the year before. We didn’t learn from this last year. And I reminded them that I showed it to them on Thursday. We just stay back there, we pick that ball off or knock it down, and really the game is over going into the fourth quarter, we get the ball back. I showed them a play in two-minute, I showed them the blocked field goal and I showed them a couple other plays and then I showed them that play to end it. The message being hey, you’re doing a lot of really good things, we can improve by everyone doing their job a little bit better, and not everyone trying to go make a play. You hope, after seeing it, that they all recognize, ‘Wow, that was a great job by James of just doing his job, making the play.’ Now, if that was the middle of the first quarter, scoop that thing and go score. But, last play of the game, have some football awareness. And I thought that was really cool that he had that football awareness.”

***On the differences between Coach Snyder’s teams and Coach Klieman’s team…***

“Different X’s and O’s, they certainly have their own mark on the team. I know, when you’re in Year 1, you’re building toward what you want to get to, but you resemble what they did, because he has a veteran group. He has a lot of seniors out there playing. So, there’s a lot of similarities, but they certainly have their own mark. The biggest thing is they run the ball, they play defense, they’re physical, they play great special teams, they don’t beat themselves and they have really good quarterback play.”

***On what does that the field goal do for John Mayers mentally moving forward…***

“No moment will probably feel too big for him moving forward. The issue is sometimes you have a guy going out there to kick and he’s not a real good kicker. So, you’re kind of hoping he makes it. John’s a good kicker. He makes them all the time in practice. He just had to get that first one under his belt. That’s two weeks in a row now on the first drive that we’ve driven the ball, got to like fourth-and-three and I’ve kicked a field goal. Which, fourth-and-three, I like to go for it. My goal was, ‘Hey, this guy needs to get his first field goal, so let me just get him one in the bank.’ That hasn’t worked out, so then later I went for it a couple times on fourth down. I think we were 2-for-3 on fourth down. So now he’s got his first game-winner, he got his first field goal, his first Twitter viral, whatever. He’s got it all out of the way now, so he can just get back to being confident knowing that he can do it. We all know he can do it, and he did it in a tough situation. They were coming to block it, there was a lot of wind in his face, and he made it dead down the middle. The most fun part for me was there were a bunch of kids on the berm, maybe this big (holding his hand up pretty low), and they were going nuts when he made the kick. So, it was fun, it was a great moment. We didn’t have to get to that moment, it could have been a boring fourth quarter if we had played better. But, credit to Iowa State. He came through and saved us. That’s what I told the team, Mayers saved the game for us. So, let’s learn from it as if we lost, but let’s celebrate the fact that we won.”

***On the fact that last year’s game against K-State came down to a field goal by Connor Martin…***

“I was thinking about that, actually, in the game. I was like, ‘Well, this happened last year.’ What we’re trying to do is we want all of Waco to come to all of our games. We’re trying to make them as entertaining as possible. You don’t even have to come to the first half, just come to the fourth quarter. No, I have confidence in all of the players. That was my message to myself before the game is trust the players. We threw as many deep balls as I’ve ever thrown in a game. We threw the ball up and said go get it guys. We went for it on fourth down. We trusted the players to go make the plays, and they did. And we’re going to trust them again this week. We just have to be a little bit more disciplined as a coaching staff, as a head coach and as a team to have everyone really focused on the details of do your job and not freelance out there.”

***On how does that comeback help the team…***

“I think it brought back the feelings from maybe Vanderbilt last year. I think Charlie had a lot of confidence, ‘Hey, just give me the ball back and I’ll take us down there to win.’ I think it lets us know that no matter what happens, if we get the ball in the fourth quarter, we’ll always have a chance with our offense in two-minute and the defense getting the ball back.”