

Temple vs. East Carolina November 26, 2016

HC Matt Rhule

Introduction:

"Thank you everybody for being here. Obviously we are extremely excited to get the win tonight or senior night and to send our seniors out the way they deserve to be sent out. They are tremendous kids. They have battled through adversity. They are going to back-to-back bowl games and they are back to back Eastern Division champions. More than anything else, as much as I am proud of what they have accomplished, I am more proud of what they have done. They have overcome all kinds of obstacles in their own life and obstacles as a team and as a senior group. I am really proud of them. I am happy that we could win this game tonight against as prolific offense. I thought a lot of our guys did a tremendous job. For us to hold Zay Jones, the great player that he is, to seven catches is extremely difficult. I thought they have a tremendous plan early. I can tell you that senior day you usually don't start off on the greatest of rhythms. We were able to get back in rhythm. The offense answered. I am pleased with Jahad and the run game. PJ got hurt so obviously he was a little limited, but he made some big throws especially early. It was great to get a team win and get everybody in. We are honored to represent the East."

On getting back to the championship...

"I think it shows the resolve of those kids, to be sitting there with a 3-3 record and to win six straight. I told them trophies and rings come and go. I have a ring at my house from when I was at Penn State that sits next to my bed. Those things are material. To be able to come back and battle from where we were at with the adversity and to not turn on each other or give up on the year and be selfish was what matters. I am really excited about that. We want to compete and be relevant in the conference championship race every year. Obviously winning the east side two years in a row makes us relevant."

Thoughts on the championship...

"I am not even thinking about the Championship game yet. I don't mean that in a disrespectful way. What I will do now is on Sunday and Monday I will go back into those times. I spent all my time thinking about how to win this game. Sitting there last year having to win the last two and in the same situation this year, I can't begin to think about next week. A tremendous challenge lies ahead of us. What an honor it will be to be able to play against Navy. What happened last year is not in my thought process right now. I am just happy with this win tonight."

On having the same conference record two years in a row...

"Anytime you repeat wins it is hard because everyone is aiming at you. While I would love to go undefeated in the conference going 7-1 both years is a challenge and it shows that our players got better. When you do 7-1 one year you sneak up on people and they know what you can do. For them to do what they did this year is

outstanding. To me it is more about the journey and the ups and downs of the year. It is more about seeing the players really grow up in front of our eyes. Also it is about seeing our coaches respond and react to our team. I think that has been the fun part for me.”

On the rushing game...

“We obviously had the first drive early when we hit them in the air. The next drive PJ got hurt. We got talked into a bad play the next play. That is not on the players. We got a little bit of run game going. I thought Adonis Jennings was so huge tonight. We were throwing the ball out to him one on one and him making some guys miss helped. We called a trick play that Jahad pulled down. Our offensive line did a nice job. Our running backs did a nice job. Our receivers shared the ball when they had to. We converted some third downs to keep us on the field to allow the momentum to go. Running the ball is also about your defense. To be able to hold them was great. The only thing I am upset about tonight was the kickoff coverage. It got better at the end. That has been an area of weakness all year long. I have not done a good enough job in that area.”

On Praise Martin-Oguike...

“I have been proud of Praise forever. The humility it took for him to come back. He could have gone anywhere but he chose to come back to finish what he started here. He has a tremendous family. To see the student and the man that he has become manifests itself on the field. He was tired early. They were going a little fast. He is just one other piece of a tremendous defense. He does his job and when his chance comes he makes the play.”

On what he told the seniors when they first arrived as freshmen...

“I talked about the same thing I talk about now. Everything our program about is player development. We are trying to develop them to be the best student, man, and player that they can be. We believe that if you develop your players to be great students then everyone graduates and feels their life getting better because they are getting an education. We have 25 guys getting 26 degrees. We have guys with two years left getting their degree. If you have guys who are honest, have integrity, give to the community, and are trustworthy then that is all we can ask for. We have a team full of brothers who can trust each other, because they have become great men. We have really great football players. We have seen guys go from walk-ons, or no star recruits to guys that are going to play in the NFL. That is the whole point of our program. We try to develop every guy. If you do that then you have a really good team. I am not saying that is my only goal here, but that is how we do it.”

On the secondary...

“I think our secondary has done a great job of guys stepping up and taking their turn when the turn came. It is all a part of everything. It is the offense running the ball. It is the defense stopping the run and holding them with 42 yards and 27 carries. When you hold someone to 42 yards, it changes the play calls. They had a couple plays. They are really good. They know how to throw the ball as well as anybody.”

We hung in there and played what we could play. A lot of guys on defense stepped up.”

On Bryant’s health...

“I think it is something with his shoulder. I congratulated him and came over here. I will go back in after words and get the true medical reports. Knowing Ventell he will be able to play next week.”

On Bryant’s health entering the game...

“He got hurt. We didn’t know if he could go today. This morning I really didn’t think he would be able to go but he told me he could a little. We tried to play him here and there. I thought Adonis Jennings stepped up and rose to the occasion. Because of that we didn’t feel the pressure to play Ventell. He hurt his shoulder so we tried to play him in spots.”

On the progression of the season...

“I think we got better. That isn’t the answer everyone wants. We played really well in the Memphis game for a long time, then we fell apart. I think it was at the point the players decided that we have to play 60 minutes. We lost to PSU by a touchdown. We had a touchdown called back in that game and 13 penalties. They are #7 in the country. To lose to the #7 team in the country by a touchdown makes us sick to our stomachs. That is with tremendous respect to them. We lost some tough games. This is an eight win team. What happened to us is the team rallied together and decided it was time to put it all together. I don’t want the story lines to be lost. Our offensive and defensive lines have gotten so much better as the year went on. We didn’t have Jahad, Ventell, or Champ for some games. We weathered the storm. We got better and have come together at the right time.”

On no penalties and no turnovers...

“No penalties? Jeeze. I think the turnovers are something we have gotten better at recently. We had a couple at UConn. I think our kids were just really locked in and ready to play. The first kick off wasn’t great. I thought our kids were just excited but also calm and in the moment. This week was nice because they weren’t talking about championships and titles. They were just talking about playing really good football. When you just concentrate on doing your job and playing as hard as you can you usually can do it. When you worry about all that other stuff is when you make the mistakes. That is a big part of the maturing process that these guys have gone through.”

On focusing on the next steps of the season...

“My thing is I don’t want them to have any regrets. I don’t want to feel like I didn’t do my part to help them get where they need to be. What I have tried to do is teach them that it isn’t about what music you listen to before the game, your shirt being un-tucked, and it’s not about the other stuff. We watched a lot of college football today and talked at the pregame meal. Football is just about loving the guys you play and playing as hard as you can. We just try to teach them to enjoy every moment.

We want them to play like they have something to lose and like they had something to gain. We will go play another game. It is another game for another trophy. To me it is one more opportunity to try to play together and as well as we can before we go off to a bowl game. They have two chances to play together as a team and I hope they enjoy it."

On the offensive diversity...

"It is been what we have done every week. We have been early on in games running speed sweeps to wear people out. A lot of people are coming out against us and playing with five down lineman. Not everyone has the depth that we have. We try to get the ball to the perimeter early on in games and make the other team chase the ball. Once you get tired from all that you can't internally blitz as much. Once you start to make them defend the outside of the field then we feel the inside will open up. We want to put the ball in different hands and sometimes it works or it doesn't. We try to make teams defend multiple people. We you hand the ball to one guy you're making it too easy."

On watching the USF-UCF game...

"I watched it this morning and the OSU-Michigan game. I love Willie Taggart. I have tremendous respect for him and we are close personal friends. If I didn't go to the game I would love nothing more than for him to win it. After we beat someone I route for them to win. USF is a top 10 or 20 team. They are one of the most prolific offenses to ever be in this league. The fact that we won and took a knee at the end of the game is a tremendous accomplishment on our resume. I mean that not for the people but for us. We beat one of the most prolific offenses and they beat us last year. Next year we will have another war. I route for the people that we play. It makes us look better."

On overcoming adversity...

"I think anytime you see young people be at their best when their best is needed is fun and rewarding. I think anytime you are challenged and you overcome it that is rewarding. I think last year there was a different feeling. It was still a great feeling. This year to be 3-3 and sit there and walk in our facility to just us and know that we are the only ones who think we can do it is something to grow from. I am not saying that we didn't have people who believed in us, but nationally. It was kind of like a let's do this together thing. The great thing about this team is all the different guys stepping up. Jager Gardner getting the touchdown run tonight was great. To see guys wait their turn and be selfless is rewarding. It is great to see them sacrifice and do their job then taking advantage of the opportunity when their chance came. That is the part that has been fun. I wish I could take back every time that we lost. I am not happy we went 2-2 out of conference, but I am proud we went 7-1 in conference."

On seeing this finish after starting 3-3...

"I think you question and doubt yourself sometimes. I was wondering what I was doing wrong here after we lost to Army and PSU. The Memphis game that went

away. After the Memphis game I saw Mike Siravo and he said he thought we had a chance to have a really good football team. That sounds crazy but sometimes you think boy we are not very good. He said we still had a chance once a couple things came together. We tried to focus on those things. I would not sit here and say I knew this would happen. My way of looking at is reflecting on what I am doing wrong, and what I can do better. When everyone has that approach is when you have chance."

On the defense compared to others Rhule has coached...

"I would hate to disrespect some of those old defenses because they were extremely good. This is a really special defense for what they are able to do against the run and the pass game. They have played really well. We will find out how special they are next week. They are facing a prolific offense and Coach Ken is a tremendous coach. I think what they have done this year has been outstanding. Looking back at our line up at PSU and three weeks later you will see four or five different names. It has been a very strong defense."

On the experience of being in the championship last year...

"I haven't really thought about the game so I am not going to say much. I don't think last year we were not ready to play. If you look at what we did against Houston compared to everyone else at the time it was impressive. That Houston team was unreal. We played them as well as anybody. Navy is 7-1 and we are 7-1 and we play it on the road. I have no complaints because we understand the other factors. I think our kids know and understand that we have got to go play a great game against a great team. Tonight we are enjoying this game. Tomorrow they better start thinking about next week's game."

On 19 wins over two years...

"It is a tremendous statement about the seniors on this team. They came from 2-10 to 10 wins and 9 wins. They have done it the hard way. They don't always do it with a ton of fans. We don't have cameras in the locker room. We try to do our business and we don't say a lot. I usually don't say this but I am proud of that every one of those kids donated their per-diem for after the game tonight to buy turkeys for people in Philadelphia tonight. I am proud we went to the movies Wednesday but ten kids volunteered to go with Rich for charity. These are really great kids and we don't always broadcast that. When you start doing good things out there, good things will happen. 19 wins in two years, back to back bowl games, and back to back championships has been fun."

DC Phil Snow

On limiting Jones...

We did some different stuff but our players played really well against him too. I think he only had 7 catches for 61 yards, he's really a great player and we did a great job of limiting him.

On how to plan for Navy next weekend...

I don't know, they have been unstoppable this season. We will have to watch them this week and see.

On Praise Martin-Oguike...

I'm very proud of him; he has really come far and made a lot of plays for our defense. But a lot of guys have like Haason Reddick he has come through a lot the past 4 years it's amazing. It's been fun to watch and hopefully we have a couple more good games in us.

On Nate Hairston...

Nate is a big kid that can run. He has done a fantastic job. After the field goal we put him into the boundary and he's just hard to throw against he's a great player and very developed.

DE Praise Martin-Oguike

On playing with pain...

"I just take care of my body. I just do whatever it takes to keep myself on the field. The strength and conditioning guys do everything they can to keep us healthy, but everybody is banged up so I do what I have to do. I like to be out there with my guys."

On going to a second straight AAC championship game...

"I love how far we've come as a university. Coach Rhule has really taken us to another level and I am glad I was able to see that happen over the last few years. It's just amazing to watch how a school that was a laughing stock in football, I'm mean we were a basketball school, but now we've just kept growing and it's great to see how everything has come together for the school."

On making the sack/fumble recovery...

"I'm just doing my part to help the team win. The DBs did a great job to help out the D-line today against a very good passing team."

On a turning point in the season...

"After the Memphis game, we watched the film and saw the two or three things that made us lose the game. We saw those one or two things big plays that caused us to lose, so we just had to correct those things, penalties and stuff. After that we got out rhythm going and the chemistry with the guys really got going. We saw that if we could just correct one or two things we could win every game."

On how Temple is going to stop Navy's offense...

"We just got to be tough. They will try and question our manhood. They are a very good team, well coached. So if we just come and do our jobs and play tough we'll win the game. I don't see why not. We just got to be on top of everything. It is going to be a real challenge and I think we're up to it."

On the consistency of the Temple defense despite the large amount of rotations and injuries...

"I just think that we are a really talented team. Some of the freshmen we have right now are going to be real good. So I just think it's a 'next man up' mentality. We have great coaches that teach us everyday, so when it's the next guys turn they are just ready to go. We have a lot of great players."

On what can be learned from last years conference championship loss...

"Last year was our first time really being in that situation so we really didn't know what to expect and we played a really good team. This year we're going to play really good team, too. We just have to make sure that we learn from our mistakes. If everybody just plays hard and does their job then we are going to be fine."

On playing D-line against the triple option...

"I think it's fun. If you just take care of what you got to do and everybody takes care of their selves then it will be fine. We just have to fly around. It's football, they pass and run the ball, they just do it a little differently from under center. We just have to play tough and it will be fine."

OL Dion Dawkins**On tonight's big win...**

"It took long days in and long nights out; blood, sweat, and tears to get back here so I'm very thankful. ECU was a great team and they played us hard. We're excited to get the win."

How the season was turned around after slow start...

"By following the process and focusing in on the small things."

On Coach Rhule's plan for Dawkins before coming to Temple...

"Like Coach Rhule said, if I choose to come here and I trust in what he coaches, then I will get what I want in the end and so will he; that's a conference championship and a winning season. Every year has been an improvement. Coach Rhule has stuck to what he said, and I'm going to stick to my promise to him and that's giving my all."

On having doubts on the football program during losing seasons...

"In the beginning of course, but once I matured and realized that I have to follow the process then the sky's the limit for Temple's program."

On being Coach Rhule's first class...

"Yes, we're the second team to get this far and we're in the position to do something that has never been done. For the guys who came in here with Coach Rhule, it's very special to us because this is exactly what he said would happen. We just had to trust and believe."

On adjustments O-line did to free up the backs...

"We took everything personal. Every time our QB gets hit, we would punish ourselves. We just took it extremely personal and wanted to do right for the running back and quarterback. We had to realize that if we don't bring our A game every game, then the offense can't function. We had to put all the weight on our shoulders."

On how the team is different from the Week 1 loss to Army...

"We're more focused, realized that winning is not easy in Division I ball. We had to lock in to what Coach was preaching and that's the process of being 1-0 after every week."

WR Adonis Jennings

On guys being injured on the team and stepping up this week...

"I come out every day to practice, I come ready. I did know I had to step up and make plays, but I worked for this. I'm just thankful to get a chance to play for this team."

On how seniors played today...

"The whole senior class played well today just to top off another East Division. Jahad and the whole offensive line did a great job pounding the ball as well all the other backs."

On how UCF game influenced the season...

"I believe the UCF game definitely opened our eyes. It made us come closer. That plane ride back home was so fun and after that game we all came together."

DB Nate Hairston**On what changer after UCF...**

After the game we came together as seniors and as a team and we decided that we were going to carry the team. The leadership that has stepped up since then has been tremendous.

On defensive rotation...

I think that us converting to wide receiver is a testament to our work ethic and to Coach Fran Brown, he works with us and stays on us to play the way we did.

On plan for Jones...

No strict plan. We wanted to throw a little bit of everything at him, Zone, man and just a mixture of everything.

On last year's title game...

I think we gained the experience of knowing what it's like to be in that big game and what it takes to win.

DL Haason Reddick**On winning back to back division championships...**

"It feels great, we wanted the same results as last year. Also for us seniors to win on senior night is an even bigger accomplishment. "

On being on the team with different records each year...

"We are just following Coach Rhule's process that he lays out for us. It's a beautiful thing, when you follow the process you win and when you don't you lose. For us as seniors we have to get everyone on board to follow the process. Winning is just a beautiful thing to see."

On the mentality from Memphis game till now...

“We had to take a look at what we were losing. We took a look a red zone, special teams, rushing defense, and especially our kickoff team. We said if we win these things then we will win the game.”

LB Avery Williams

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RB Jahad Thomas

On the struggles from freshman year to now and the similarities with Phillip Walker...

“It’s actually not too different. We talked about this way before we had a feeling we were going to come in here as freshmen and make an impact. It is really ironic that it happened for us but it is just so crazy that we are in this position. “

On “unfinished business”...

“It means a lot. I feel as though I didn’t play as well I as could in the beginning but I knew that I was banged up a lot. Pulled apart was how I was playing and I couldn’t play as hard as I wanted to. I am feeling really healthy right now so I am really looking forward to these opportunities.”