Carlton: New Texas football coach Charlie Strong is not Mack Brown, but he can still make a specific impression

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AUSTIN — Charlie Strong won the news conference, which may be one of the remaining connections to the Mack Brown era.

The rules and the culture are the changing in Austin. Even as Strong paid tribute Monday to Brown and the late Darrell Royal, the signs were clear enough.

Strong is all about toughness and accountability. He pledged “to work like it’s fourth-and-1 — fourth-and-inches, more than that” to again put “the program back on the national stage.”

Consider the answer that the defense-first Strong gave when asked about his offensive philosophy. He talked about Big 12 staples such as an aggressive, up-tempo look that will score points.

“They have to realize this,” Strong said. “It’s still all about just physical toughness. Can you go run the football? You know at the end of the day, you have to line up and run the ball, and that is going to be built just within the toughness of your program.”

Obviously, Strong was walking a fine line. He dodged a question about what the word “soft” means to him.

The subtext was plain to Texas fans. Throughout Brown’s tenure, the program drew the dreaded “Country Club” label. Maybe some years, it applied. But a program that produced Kasey Studdard, Brian Orakpo, Roy Miller and Jackson Jeffcoat cannot really be defined as soft.

It’s pretty much guaranteed the label is now history, at least for the Strong era.

During his news conference, Strong used the word “tough” or “toughness” 11 times.

Just to drive the point home, consider his answer when asked what he would tell recruits about his program.

“The mentality is always going to be physical and mental toughness,” Strong said. “You have to build your program on toughness. That’s where all the successful programs, that’s what they do. It’s all about toughness.”

He relayed how he had spoken with Brown on Sunday night after accepting the job. Strong relayed speaking at a high school coaching clinic in Austin with Brown and said the man who had the head coaching job for 16 seasons would always be welcome around the program. He wanted to build on Brown’s track record.

Then he added: “You ran your program, now I have to run mine.”

Everything — from what people see on the field to what they don’t see on the Longhorn Network — will be a reflection on Strong’s choice.

Brown is a football coach with remarkable PR and political gifts.

Charlie Strong is a football coach. Period.

At the same time, he can make an impression at a news conference. Or at a team meeting. Or in the living room of a recruit.

“He is intense and charismatic,” said UT regent Bobby Stillwell, a member of the eight-person advisory committee. “I wouldn’t want to be the player to explain something to him after I messed up.”

The advisory committee laid out the criteria early in the search process, a sort of checklist for athletic director Steve Patterson.

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The Dallas Morning News

"He was our No. 1 candidate," Patterson said, sounding slightly perturbed. "He was the only person we offered the job to, and he accepted it."

Strong seemed less bothered by question. He settled in nicely after early nerves at the news conference, wearing a burnt orange tie and hugging Royal's widow, Edith, as he entered.

"I could have been the 15th choice, and I'm so happy to be the head football coach here," Strong said. "Twenty, 15, it doesn't matter, whatever choice I was, I'm the head football coach."

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New Texas football coach Charlie Strong hopes to have his staff pretty much in place when students return next Monday. Here is the offensive and defensive coordinator outlook:

Offensive coordinator: Keep an eye on Ohio State OC Tom Herman, a strong recruiter who worked well with quarterbacks Braxton Miller and Kenny Guiton. Clemson OC Chad Morris is a hot property who might cost $1.5M or more.

Defensive coordinator: Strong is a major factor in the defense. His DC at Louisville, former Texas player Vance Bedford, will be a logical choice if Bedford doesn't land a head coaching job.

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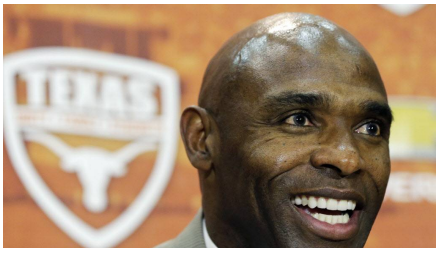
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