University of Texas Football Media Conference

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Charlie Strong

CHARLIE STRONG: We had a couple of good team meetings this past weekend, and it's time for us to pull this team together. This is a big game, and we know what we're up against, but we're ready to get going. And we know this: That we're going to play with a lot of passion, a lot of intensity. We're going to be a team that's disciplined, a team that's focused and a team that just really enjoys playing.

I know the coaches and players are excited about getting back on the practice field so that we can go back to work, and this is a week that we get this thing going. That when we get our confidence back, you know we look at the previous two weeks, we played with so much confidence. And it's not so much of how we played, but it's all about after watching the tape, it's about just doing the little things, and once we do the little things, we know that we can be the team that we expect to be.

I know the team last week wasn't a team that we think it should be, but we're going to get better, and that's what it's all about right now.

Q. A game like Saturday tends to -- people want to pull back and look at the big picture. We all here know what the situation was that you were dealt with the talent and all that. But at what point is it fair to stop saying this was Mack [Brown]'s fault and this is on you and your staff?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, I never, will ever say it was Coach Brown's fault, and it wasn't his fault. It is on me. You look at it, we have the players. It's about us coaching. It has nothing to do with the last staff. They're no longer here. It's about what we have, and now it's about us working and let's get them better. Never once was it ever on coach. It's on us and it's on our staff. It's on me as a head football coach. We've got to make sure that when we put a team out there, the team is ready to go play.

Q. When you shuffled the offensive staff with [Jay] Norvell and tried to play call and had [tight ends/special teams coach Jeff] Traylor helping him…how does the special teams get divided among the staff at that point? Who is in charge and how does that get there?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, you look at the breakdown and the special teams, and it's not so much the cover units. It's all about the execution when you look at the snappers snap the ball over. What he told me, he says, 'Coach, I go down and I thought I heard him say ready, so I hesitated and then I let it go.' I probably should have just taken a penalty. And I said, yeah, it's probably best to take a penalty because we gave up two points.

Then the kickers, it's about just going out there and punting the ball where it needed to be punted, and then the field goal kicker executing and knocking them down.

Q. Coach Strong, obviously you felt close, and (there were) legitimate arguments as to why you should have won the Oklahoma State game…and now after the 50-7 and the way you played against TCU, do you feel that you're far away now? How does that adjust your expectations?
CHARLIE STRONG: I don't think we're far away at all. But we just didn't have them prepared to play as a coach. And we know we can do better ourselves and be more focused. But that team there Saturday, I know this, we're a better football team than that, without a doubt. We're a way better football team than that.

Q. Earlier in the season it sounded like you would make a change in who was calling the plays. Would you consider doing that again from the defensive side of the ball?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, you look at film and just defensively I go back to it, and you look at the things that hurt us on defense. We're sitting there in the coverage and it's a loaded coverage. They run a wheel route and it's so simple that we don't chase an inside route. Then we end up with the defensive back taking the wheel and we let it go. The one big one, the big throw is Holton Hill had really good coverage on the receiver, and he just goes up. He's a physical receiver, really good receiver. He goes up and comes down with the ball.

But we know this: On defense it's about just gap control. It's about getting off blocks. It's so many things defensively in the breakdown. What I did yesterday is that I gave it to the offensive side and I gave it to the defensive side. It's just certain commandments that you have to have on both sides of the ball where you talk about penalties. How many penalties do we have and why? And then you talk about turnovers. You talk about like on offense, how many runs was two yards or less and the reason why. Defense, how many runs were five yards or less and why? And you talk about just getting off the field on third downs, but there are so many things.

When you break that down, then you look at -- and I said to our team in our team meeting, I said it's not so much what someone does to us, it's what we do to ourselves. I put that up, and I said, look at us offensively. This is what happened to us. This is what happened to us on defense. Now we get those things corrected and we're going to have a good football team, but we have to get those things corrected.

Q. You've been a defensive coach for 20 years now. Is this as tough of a time you've ever had coaching defense? Does that bother you as much as anything not being able to?
CHARLIE STRONG: Everything starts with defense. As with any team, you've got to play through great defense, because you have no chance if you don't play great defense, and right now we're not. And the thing we have to do, and it's so many factors that come into play. The first one, okay, we go three and out. Okay, with that same intensity let's keep it up. We go back out, we can't give up the big plays. We've got to get off the field on third down, and we just can't allow the quarterback to just stand in the pocket and air it out.

Now, and I will say this: To some of the schemes that we're playing, many quarterbacks don't hold the ball very long, so they're not getting there. It's all about coverage, because that ball,

when those receivers come out of their cuts, the ball has been released. We've just got to play high pressure, so when you do blitz, you've got to win the one-on-one blocks.

Q. Coach, a game like that sends a little panic through some of the fan base. How much do you draw from your rebuild job at Louisville to keep you confident, to keep you unwavering, and are there some similarities in what is going on?
CHARLIE STRONG: Yeah, the only thing that's different here that was different in Louisville, the score is different. But you've still got to believe in the mission, and you've got to have confidence, and you have to have confidence in our players. And I told our players, I said I have so much belief that we're going to get it turned.

And it does look gloomy because of what happened. When you go close, close, and then all of a sudden you get blown out. But it's more of what I keep saying is I didn't think that was our team. And I think we can play much better than what we played, and we can coach much better. It's all about the coaching. That game is on me. It's all about doing a better job and the preparation and the focus and everything about it.

Q. Speaking of special teams all season being a priority. Why aren't we seeing any improvement there, and can there be improvement at this point?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, the special teams it is just a message. It's not like -- you know, a lot of times where you get concerned with special teams and we should be concerned because we missed two field goals. And then we get a snap…snapped over the head.

But a lot of times when you look the coverage units are there. So it's not like the return yardage is what's hurting us, it's the execution that was on us where we're not making the field goals or we're missing the extra point. It's all about each and every day going out, kicking and putting them in a situation and making them kick the ball, same thing with the punting game. Just making sure that he punts the ball and we can't have a shank. We can't end up with the ball -- we put the ball on the 20 to kick it down the field and we kick it out of bound which hurts because they get it on the 50.

Those are things there that can be corrected because it's all about the kicker gaining confidence and them getting the confidence and getting it back.

Q. I know you touched on it a little bit with the meetings, but can you elaborate? Did you call the meeting this week? And the players held it last week, but does that give you confidence that whatever was said in the meeting this week will help?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, the meeting I called Saturday was after the game when the plane landed. When we got back here on Saturday we had a team meeting. There were just some things that needed to be discussed and then we had another team meeting yesterday. But Saturday I was not going to let us leave here until we got some things straight.

Q. When you talk about this is the week you guys get your confidence back and play with passion. After what you saw Saturday what in the world makes you think it will switch in a week?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, I think they will. Because you think about it, and I look at the game

on Saturday and it wasn't so much of when you kind of setback after looking at the big picture. It was more just execution. Then when something bad happens, we've got to be able to bounce back because we'd fallen to adversity before. So don't all of a sudden think because a team can make a play on you that we can't bounce back. Then once bad things happen, that's when you start losing it, because you can't -- you cannot ever not believe in yourself. You always have to have that confidence.

And our guys have the confidence. It's just that good things got to happen. But you've got to make the good things happen. That's what we're not doing. It's almost like we're waiting for whomever we play for them to do something bad, and all of a sudden we can jump. No, no, no. Let's go out and make those bad things happen. But let's be the ones that make it happen for them.

Q. There are a lot over the last few weeks, a lot of bold and sometimes very ignorant opinions coming from national writers. How does that affect recruiting and maybe more importantly, how does that affect you when it's happening on a national level?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, a lot of times and I really don't hear it, but as far as recruiting this is the University of Texas, and whomever, the players are going to want to come here. So they can hear all the noise, but the ones that really want to come, they're going to come anyway. I don't let it bother me.

I tell ourselves listen, guys, whatever has been said, rightfully so, because we're not getting it done the way we should. So people are going to have opinions. I always say this: You open up to public criticism, so let's deal with it, but we can get it turned. Because if you win, you don't have to worry about it. Now if you lose and get beaten the way we got beat, it's going to happen for you.

Q. When you look at your team, do you see the desperation, the hurt, the 'want to' that you're going to need to see to get this thing turned around?
CHARLIE STRONG: Yes. Our guys, and look, I know they're young, but they do hurt. It hurt them. It hurt them at halftime on Saturday and it hurt them after the game. Even when Rick asked me the question about the team meeting, I had some guys stand up and say it was their fault. No, no, no, it wasn't your fault. It was a team fault. It wasn't any individual fault, okay? We all did it. I played my part in this. Okay? We all did.

It. So it's not just one person that it's happening to. But they feel it because you think about it, they're going to hear it anyway. Whether they feel it, they're going to hear it. They want to win too. So it's not like they're backing away saying we can't get it done. We can get the problem fixed. It's all about us playing together and playing as a team.

Q. Back to recruiting. Talking about like the national perception and all that stuff affects recruiting. When you look at recruiting rankings, and I know how you think about recruiting rankings, but when looking at your staff, who is Mike Giglio, what does he do? Are you happy with the strategy you're getting recruiting-wise to get the word out?
CHARLIE STRONG: Oh, we get the word out. What happened is that we already said these are the guys that we're going to recruit. And what Gigs does is Gigs just follows up and he goes and

finds out all the information on every recruit and he passes it to the position coach. So every coach, every position coach is responsible for recruiting his position. So then what I do is then I come in behind all of them.

So as far as recruiting goes, I have my collection of guys that I recruit. These are my guys. I have 7 or 8, these are my guys. Then we have just a broad picture of these are the guys that we're recruiting. And like Bob said, with the national media, they're all going to hear it because they're right here. Most of them are because of who we're recruiting right now, they're in the state, so they hear it and they see it.

So they come out, you get them on the phone, and they're still positive when you get them on the phone. So it's more about what they always wait to see. And it's so funny when you talk about recruiting, if they have a chance to go in and help a football team, then they're going to go. Because a lot of them now, they look at the number of freshmen we're playing right now, a lot of them don't want to go anywhere and sit. So if you can say, hey, listen, you come here, come to work and if you have a chance you can contribute. If you have a chance to play, you're going to get a lot of them.

Q. Are you concerned that guys are making their mind up right now when you guys are focused on what's going on right here?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, because I always say this. Signing day is not until the first Wednesday (of February), not until that day. So they commit and then mid-semester we're going to still recruit them.

Q. First, I was just wondering, have you ever had a meeting like that after a game or as a head coach like right after the game? My second question was about No. 25 [KaVontae Turpin] for TCU. Maybe he's a guy that's had a little bit of trouble accounting for? Is that just something he used on a lot of players. You've got 9 [Josh Doctson] and 22 [Aaron Green], you're focused on those guys, it's hard to keep up on that?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, when you talk about the first one, the first meeting, I may have had like maybe one where I had to call a meeting after a game. But when you talk about [KaVontae Turpin], and what he was, he was placed to the boundary with [Josh Doctson]. So what they did, they worked the boundary a lot. So it wasn't a matter of who was placed there whether it be Naashon or 19 [Peter Jinkens] or even drop down to man coverage or play a bunch of man three. It just wasn't to replace them. And one time he went on the underneath route where he got back inside and then he can get over the top of you. And then we talk about the wheel route, and you can't have your eyes inside, and they beat us on the outside route.

Q. Obviously one of the bigger problems on the team is both sides up front on the offensive line and defensive line. What can you do in three days in practice, one day of hitting to get your offensive line and defensive line to be prepared to play against the University of Oklahoma?
CHARLIE STRONG: That's where it starts. It starts up front. You have to be physical at the point of attack. You have to win the line of scrimmage. You've got to control the line of scrimmage. You have to be able to run the ball and we have to stop the run. So we know this, we go into the game, and our mindset, if we're going to play physical, we have to run the football.

That's going to be our mindset to go run the ball.

Now on defense, we know what they have. If you look at the runs and look at mixing two big backs, and even with [quarterback Baker] Mayfield running around. So we're going to have to stop the run. This is probably as balanced of an offense we faced all year because they can run and throw. A lot of teams can throw it, but they have a combination of both. So it is about us controlling the line of scrimmage and rise up and go in and go play.

I tell our guys, if we say the strength of our team is our defensive front, there is a good challenge for you. You talk about offense, and we want to move the football. There is another good challenge for you.

Q. I'm guessing one of those two meetings is where Kris Boyd apologized for his teammates. Will he face any discipline from you? Is that a sign that things are splintering in the locker room?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, that's not a sign. Kris Boyd did apologize to the team, but sometimes it's just immaturity where a guy walks in. When we come in at halftime, even when we came in on Saturday I brought the whole team together because I wasn't pleased at the way we were playing. So when I called them together, and then they separated with their coaches. So then their coaches have actually the offense, they talk to the defense, and then we talk to the offense with Jay [Norvell] and then we split up, make our adjustments and split up into position.

So whenever that happened, I don't know when it happened, but, yes, we'll handle it within where we'll handle the discipline within. But it's more they know they can't be on the phone. We have a team meeting, and a phone can't be in the room.

Q. Will Kris Boyd play against OU?
CHARLIE STRONG: He will play against OU.

Q. I know you're extremely loyal, but Johnathan Gray isn't getting anything done this year, and Nick Rose has definitely been struggling. Do you have to consider getting some guys behind them more playing time?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well look at Saturday with J. Gray, the thing about him is he just works so hard. He's such a positive impact and a positive player. He helps D'Onta (Foreman) a lot. So you look at those two guys and they're back and forth. So it's not so -- I know D'Onta had a big game there on Saturday. He carried a bunch of it. But those guys are back and forth, and J. Gray's good for him, and he's good for J. Gray.

Nick Rose, we had a conversation. We talked this past weekend. So I told him what we're going to do is open it up, just open competition. (I'm) not very pleased with what we're doing there.

Q. Charlie, what do you think is a fair amount of time for you to turn this program around? Do you worry that you might not even get to year three at all?
CHARLIE STRONG: Every day is a battle, so I don't (worry). I have no idea. Every day I come in knowing that it's my job to come in and make sure that this program is doing -- is represented the right way and doing the right things and going to win football games and developing young

men. That's each and every day.

Q. Are you still letting the position coaches decide when players go into a game? Are you on the same page in terms of (Holton) Hill and (Kris) Boyd getting on the field and playing, or are you letting the position coaches decide that?
CHARLIE STRONG: What we do is on Saturday mornings when we meet before a game is that we sit in there as a staff. When I have the staff meetings, I see Vance (Bedford) and ask him how we're going to play on defense, Jay (Norvell), how we're going to attack on offense, and go around the table and say, hey, when are we going to place these guys in the game. So everybody has a plan. When we sit around the table you're knowing exactly when these guys are going to go in the game, whoever we're substituting. Then it comes down to once they've played, then who is playing the best and you just leave them in the game and go play with them.

Because even you look at it, we start off with Holton [Hill], and then D'Onta [Freeman] played, and then two (Kris Boyd) played, and then [Breckyn] Hager played. I mean Saturday you look out there and you're lined up with P.J [Locke III]. at safety, then you had the two freshmen at corner. Then you look at Malik [Jefferson] and [Anthony] Wheeler, and then we brought in Hager some at (line)backer. But when you talk about the young guys playing, we always have a plan for that. So they don't just go in the game. No, no, no. We'll let the other guys go in and play some and we'll substitute them.

Q. Daje was countered on the gameplan they put for you guys last week, can you give us an update? Following up on that, have you had any conversation with Jerrod about how the game went?
CHARLIE STRONG: Yeah, the thing with Daje is when he got hit there Saturday he for a minute didn't know where he was. We checked him yesterday. We're going to check him each and every day to see exactly where he is. We're not going to put him out there unless he's ready to go.

I told our doctors let's make sure, because he's going to say he is (ready), but let's make sure (we go) through all the tests that he's ready to go. And Jerrod, he just felt so bad. And I told him, I said the thing you can't do is lose who you are because you have a ton of confidence and you can't let just one game be the deciding factor where all of a sudden you don't continue to compete. And that won't happen to him because he has so much confidence and he believes in himself that he's one of those guys who can bounce back.

When you're talking about young guys, sometimes they don't know. They're ready to bounce back and get going, and get ready for the next one.

Q. Is this, as big of a game as it is, is this a perfect time for this game and you know you'll get everybody locked in because it is such a rivalry and you know what the stakes are against Oklahoma?
CHARLIE STRONG: I think back to last night. A lot of times we go out on Sundays and there is a lot of joking and guys are just kind of messing around. But last night you can see that there was no joking going around, (everyone) kind of settled in. I looked at one of our coaches and said this game came at the right time for us. So now we can get them focused and get them back. When I

talk about, hey, it's time for us to get our confidence back and get these guys back to track. And, yes, it falls at a great time for us. So we'll see just how much we are going to go out and go compete, and how much we've got to get them prepared and get them focused.

Q. Do you have people in your life, tough times, good times that you kind of lean on, and maybe outside the program that you take their advice and appreciate their wisdom?
CHARLIE STRONG: I do. The thing about it is it's so funny because I guess people think I'm dying. It's tough. The thing I say about it is adversity's going to hit you and you want to do more because it's just who you are when you have that competitive nature in you. You expect more, you want to see more. And I say to people all the time, I'm okay. I can only imagine what you're going through. It is what it is. This is the University of Texas. This is what you sign on for. I do talk to people because they're going to call me. When the right ones call me, I answer their call (laughing).

Q. I was wondering if you had any injury update on [Kent] Perkins, Shiro [Davis] or (Breckyn) Hager, and how much do you look into junior college recruiting?
CHARLIE STRONG: I'll answer the second one first. When you talk about recruiting with the junior college linemen, sometimes you have to place those linemen there to really know what you're going to get back in return. But if there is a really good one out there, if you have wherever they're placed at, if that head coach knows you, they're going to give you a call. We've had some calls about the linemen. So we're going to get a chance, but you have to really research them and make sure they're the right fit.

Then with Perk and with Shiro and Hager, I know Hager has a high ankle (sprain). Right now Shiro, we'll probably get him back later on this week, and with Perk, it's just day to day, not exactly sure the timetable on him.

Q. You talked about how the veterans really pick up a lot of the freshmen right now. But there is a growing concern that some of the juniors and seniors may be checking out or going about it their own way. How do you keep those juniors and seniors involved and committed to the last six, seven games of the year?
CHARLIE STRONG: I had a meeting with the seniors, and I said to them, listen, and we were just talking about this game. I said you've been there. You know the atmosphere of some of these young guys that haven't been there. So you have to talk to them and let them understand just how big this game is.

But in talking to them, they all said, hey, Coach, we've got to get to a bowl game. That was them telling me. So a lot of times people think, hey, they're going through tough times. They won't check out. The thing about it is they want to continue to compete. And what they want to see happen is they don't want to be that group that says, hey, this group quit on them. They don't want to hear that. They just want to make sure, hey, let's go in this thing right away.

You have guys like J. Gray, you have Duke [Thomas], and [Taylor] Doyle, you still have a group of guys, [Alex] De La Torre, you have a group of guys that still want it for themselves. They're not saying -- no, no, I don't know where that's coming from. We're not going to quit.

Q. You talk about Oklahoma's style of offense. What concerns you about the quarterback?
CHARLIE STRONG: Just in looking at Baker [Mayfield], and I go back to that Tennessee game, he's unbelievable when he gets outside the pocket. It's just like he feels more comfortable when the protection breaks down and he can get outside and release the ball. His (completion) percentage rate goes up so high that he has the receivers that he can throw to with (Dede) Westbrook and (Sterling) Shepard. It's amazing to watch him. He can beat you with his feet and he can run the ball well enough and throw it where he gets the ball in the right guys hands.

So that's why I say they're just so balanced on offense because of him and watching Baker go.

Q. Last year it seemed like you guys as coaches were probably more upset about the losing than some of your players were. Like six wins will never be the standard here. Do you feel like these guys are upset about where they're sitting at right now? Does it bother them at all?
CHARLIE STRONG: Yeah, it really does bother them. For someone not to think that, you think about it, when you put all the time in, you put all the effort and you put all that work in, and you're not getting positive results, it does. It eats them alive. Then they realize the expectations here are so high that they know every day here is about work.

Every day it's about us getting better. Now that we're not having success, it bothers them, and it grinds them out. That's what I keep telling them. Listen, the only thing you have right now is your team, so you've just got to stay together and stay as a family and work through it together.

Now what happens through adversity we're going to get stronger or we're going to fall apart. But we're not going to fall apart, so you might as well realize we're going to get stronger and continue to work and just battle through it. And they understand that, especially coming from the -- because the upperclassmen have been through it. They've seen it. The freshmen, for some of them they haven't experienced losing because some of them come from really good programs. So it's the first time a lot of them have probably lost the number of games we've lost because of where they come from. So it's a matter of us just sticking together and battling it out.

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