TEXAS FOOTBALL
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Head Coach Charlie Strong

CHARLIE STRONG (opening statement): Really excited about the upcoming game and have a chance to go back to South Bend, and the thing about it, you're looking at two storied programs with a lot of tradition, 882 wins at Notre Dame, 881 wins here at The University of Texas. I was on the Notre Dame sideline many years ago and came and had a chance to come back down here in '96, but just to get this game back on the schedule is just really important to both programs. Our team is really excited, have done a great job of this preseason of going out and going to work each and every day, a different attitude, just like overall attitude and how we've been working. I said that the good thing about it is it's not about who we're going to play but how we're going to play, and it's an effort that we've got to put forth and how we have to go out and we play together as a team, and that's going to be our goal, just how hard we play and just going to play together as a team.

Q. Are you ready to unveil the quarterback?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, just don't know exactly yet, but we know this: We're going to start off with [Tyrone] Swoopes. Swoopes is going to start the game, and then [Jerrod] Heard is going to play. He's going to get enough snaps in and get him the opportunity, and the thing about it, you have two quarterbacks that have worked really hard, have competed, have pushed one another, so just really excited about watching those two guys go out and compete.

Q. Looking at the depth chart, Malik [Jefferson], [Patrick] Vahe, [Connor] Williams, when you see it all on paper, see all those red-shirt freshmen on paper, what's your feeling?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, it's so funny, we talked about that this morning in staff meeting. I said to the offensive staff, you're going to walk in there with Vahe, we're going to walk in there with Connor Williams, you've got [John] Burt, you've got a lot of guys on offense, a lot of young talent, and then on defense we're looking at Malik and looking at some of those corners, some of our defensive backs are going to play. Even on the kickoff I have some young players out there. But you know what, they've earned that right. They've worked hard, so we

feel like we've coached them well enough, so it's just go play and go compete and go play hard.

Q. Talk about the competition that you have with Tyrone and Jerrod and what their reactions were and how you keep Jerrod motivated going forward?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, there wasn't much conversation because the guys watch each other go out and compete and compete each and every day. Tyrone has played well. You look at last season, he went out and competed, and Jerrod knows just exactly where he is, and he knows he's going to play. When you know that you're going to play, you're going to go out and compete each and every day.

Q. Talk about TE DeAndre McNeal and the wide receivers.
CHARLIE STRONG: DeAndre, he's an athlete, and the thing you like about McNeal is he's strong, he's big, he's physical, can go up and get the football, but has done a good job. The thing about him, you can play him inside and outside, and also we can still take him and put him back in the backfield and let him be a guy who can move around for us.

Q. When did you know that Tyrone would be the starter? I'm sure you didn't just make this up today.
CHARLIE STRONG: No, I made it up today. I walked in here and said, you know what, I'm going to give them something so I'm going to tell them Tyrone is going to start. You know what, he's worked through camp, and we had an idea. It's been just a few weeks of how long that we've known it, and he's worked really hard. The thing about it, even with Jerrod pushing him, it's been a great battle.

Q. Can you give us an update on any injured players, or do you think D'Onta Foreman and [Edwin] Freeman is missing time --
CHARLIE STRONG: No, we don't -- when I think about guys that are not going to play is Santos, but as far as guys that are dinged, we're going to be a healthy team going into South Bend. D'Onta is back, Freeman is back, [Alex] De La Torre is back, so any guys that have had any type of bump or bruise, they all worked hard to get back, and the thing about it is that they don't want to miss this game, so if you tell a guy he's in the pad or he's injured right now, they're doing everything possible. De La Torre had a sprain, and he did everything from around the clock to get back and just making sure that he was in the training room and he's doing everything they ask him to do.

Q. [Caleb] Bluiett, was at defensive end, now at tight end, is that permanent?

CHARLIE STRONG: Well, we're going to give him a chance to play both, but right now he's a tight end, and we just needed a bigger body because you look at [Andrew] Beck is there and De La Torre and then we took McNeal and moved him back outside, so we needed a bigger, stronger player. And Bluiett, it's been a learning curve where we had to just try to get him up to speed, but he's done a great job.

Q. Not only because it's a difference in your second season, but opening against North Texas last year, opening against Notre Dame this year, what's been the attitude of the team? Are they more excited for the game? Has it made things more intense that you have this type of opponent the first week?
CHARLIE STRONG: You have an opponent like Notre Dame and then you're on the road, and you think about last year, we were at home, now we're on the road. I've tried to prepare them because we're such a young team that last week I took a segment each and every day where we had a meeting and I showed them Notre Dame. We just took clips, where you just showed the big games. I always would show something about Texas. It gave them a feeling, so they don't walk in there for the first time with their eyes big because it'll be the first time walking in there. So they have seen the stadium, they have seen us coming down the tunnel. They haven't done it, just walked into it, but they've seen it on film where they're going to have a chance.

Q. What about the kicking game? Can you review the kicking game? Do you feel confident going into the first game?
CHARLIE STRONG: You always want to make sure that the kicking game is up to speed just like your offense and defense, and you look at it, it's going to be a lot of young players out there. Our returners are going to be Daje [Johnson] and Duke Thomas. They have done a great job. [Johnathan Gray], he's going to be back there returning the kickoffs. What I really like about our kicking game is that the upperclassmen have really stepped up and they want to be a part of it. I took Peter Jinkins and I took Naashon Hughes off, so the other day they were trying to sneak in and get a rep. They said 'Coach, you need us out here, we know we can get that block for you.' But I said, no, I've got the guys I want right now. Now, if that doesn't work out, you can come back. But just looking at our kicking game, it's something that we work each and every day, and that's one of the areas that we're going to have to win. We're going to have to win the kicking game on the road if we're going to go win that football game. We're going to have to do well in the kicking game.

Q. Looking through this depth chart, true freshmen all over in the two and three deep. What's really stood out to you about this class and out on the field immediately?

CHARLIE STRONG: They've done a great job of just working, a very young, talented group. You look at Malik and you look at the three corners there, even with P.J. [Locke] coming in there in the secondary, but it's a really good, strong freshman group. Even [Charles] Omenihu has done a great job with the defensive front. Then you look on the offense with Connor, Vahe, and Burt. But there's so much young talent, [Chris] Warren, that those are guys that you feel comfortable playing just because of the way they work. And sometimes with a young guy, he just don't know. He's going to just go out there and do what you ask him to do because he just don't know, where with a lot of times with vets, they've kind of seen it and they've been around, so they kind of pace themselves. Young players, they don't pace themselves, they just go at it, and they want to start, so they try to do everything they can to get on the field.

Q. When you look at Notre Dame, what kind of jumps off the page starting with Zaire on offense?

CHARLIE STRONG: You look at Zaire is just a big, physical runner, and he's a guy that can beat you with the feet. You watch when he releases the ball, the deep throw is amazing where he gets the ball and he hangs it out there and he can throw it a long ways. Their offensive line is a veteran group. Wide receivers are a veteran group. They may be having an issue at running backs, but they have some guys who have played back there who can go move the football for them. And on defense they're really exciting. They bring a lot of pressure. You look at [Jaylon] Smith, No. 9, he brings a lot of pressure, a solid linebacking group. Even up front with [Sheldon] Day, they lose one, but Day is still their anchor, and then in the secondary, the corners are press corners. We're going to have to do a really good job at wide receiver of getting off the press and seeing if we're going to try to outrun them, seeing if we can outrun them. But a lot of speed, and they play fast. They're very aggressive, and they play fast.

Q. How good do you feel about your offensive line and the freshmen that you put in?

CHARLIE STRONG: When you go on the road and you're playing in an environment that we're playing in, those two freshmen linemen, it's a concern because you just don't know how quickly it's going to tick for them, and if they bring the pressure -- and I always say this, here I am as a defensive coach, if I see two freshman linemen I'm going to blitz you every snap and see if they can block you. But you know what, we've just got to be ready to just make sure we can

keep it -- make sure we can balance our offense and make sure that we don't allow them to pressure and put the pressure on those two guys.

Q. When you started bringing in freshmen, I'm sure the better plan would have been to start with a team that you're favored against, but you're playing these guys against Notre Dame. Who do you expect from these guys in an environment like that, and is this a lot to ask for them?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, it's not a lot to ask. I always say this: When you're at The University of Texas it's what you sign on for and you sign on to play in big games, and this is a big game for us. If you're talented enough, you can go get on the field, but let's put them on the field. That's what we've done, and this is a freshman group that have worked really hard, and they want to play. As I was saying, our freshmen just want to play; sophomores want to start; juniors want to win; and seniors are worrying about their career after football. But this is a group that is very talented, so it doesn't concern me. I'm really excited just to see how we're going to play and how hard they're going to play.

Q. Will anyone not play due to suspension? And are you going to continue to rotate captains every game?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, we will always -- the thing about captains, I end up at the end of the year saying who the captain is going to be but I just want to give each senior a chance to go be a captain, and that's why I rotate them. But knock on wood, we haven't had any suspensions so far.

Q. Not much was talked about Antwuan Davis in August, and I look down here and he's down at left corner and nickelback. What are your thoughts there?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, [John] Bonney is listed at the left corner along with Duke, so Duke and Bonney are going to share time at the nickel position, then so you have Antwuan at the other corner with [Bryson] Echols, so you have those two guys battling it out there, and then you still have [Kris] Boyd, you have Davis, you have Holton [Hill], you have those three young corners that are balanced. You have enough guys in the defensive backfield where if people do spread you out you can put enough guys on the field that can go cover, and you feel very comfortable with those guys on the field.

Q. Every class has a personality. Can you describe this class's personality?
CHARLIE STRONG: You start with that freshman group, the personality they have is they feel really good about themselves, and not in a bad way. They have a little something to them. They're a very confident group of guys, and they do believe in their abilities. What it's done is even with the upperclassmen, they've been

able to bring that group in where it hasn't been -- usually when you take an older crowd, they don't accept the young guys, but which they have done. They have accepted this group, and it's been fun to watch because you can watch older guys coaching young guys, which we didn't see before where you can sit there and watch Duke and he's sitting there coaching the young corners and telling them, and they run to him. Like one day out there at practice, something happened to Duke, and Kris Boyd is like, hey, you'd better go ask Duke that question because he can tell you what happened. But it's been fun to watch, even with the offensive linemen where guys are still coaching the younger players. But when you take on that type of personality and you start seeing it form as a team, that's what you want to see. What you're developing for them as a team and you watch the confidence, you watch the consistency and you watch guys just all of a sudden begin to pull everybody in and become as one.

Q. In training camp you sounded pretty high this team. Now that it's game week, are you still feeling as good about what you're seeing?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, I had to stay confident because if I don't the team wouldn't be confident, and it's all about us being a very confident team. We know what we're walking into. We know the environment we're walking into. So you have to have that confidence and it has to build. I just explained to our team, let's not wait to wake up Saturday morning and say we have confidence. It can't happen on Saturday morning. It's going to take each and every day. Last night we had a chance to go out and do some work, took the day off, but we come back to work on Tuesday, let's come back to work, and we're coming back to get better. Wednesday we're coming back to get better, Thursday. But it's the buildup. We just take each and every day, let's take a piece and a piece and a piece, and then when we walk in there on Saturday night, only thing we have to do is just be the best team on the field that night. That's all it takes.

Q. What do you remember about your time coaching there at Notre Dame, and what did you tell the guys about Touchdown Jesus? Do you think they'll throw you a welcome parade?
CHARLIE STRONG: They're not going to give a parade for sure. But it was a -- I had a great time there, a great University, and I was back there in 1995 with Coach [Lou] Holtz and then I ended up staying with Coach [Bob] Davie, and it was great. It's an unbelievable place just like here. Like you said, you're looking at a program so rich in tradition, there's so much pride and passion in the program. But we won't have a chance to get on campus because when we arrive, it's going to -- I think they have all their festivities with the pep rally so I didn't want to take our

players through that. When we get there on game day on Saturday that'll be the first time they have a chance to see the stadium and everything.

Q. We're coming up right at a year since Desmond [Tank] Jackson's injury. Talk about his road back and his being in this position to start this Saturday.
CHARLIE STRONG: Tank has done a great job, and you look, the thing you like about Tank is he's an older player who's been around and he understands what it takes to get back, and he wanted to get back, and he's worked so hard, and to watch him come back even during preseason camp and just his leadership, and that's one of the older guys I talked about where he's helping the young guys -- it's good to just see how he's changed because in the beginning, as I said to him, it's going to take -- we're going to need your leadership to help us lead this defense. You were a starter last year, you go down, and now you're back, and now you have a chance to really make a mark on this team and make a mark on this defense, and he's done great job.

Q. Every camp has an ebb and flow, and you talked a couple weeks ago about how you think there's been a step back the few weeks. Did it ever get to a point where you really have to go after them and get them back on focus?
CHARLIE STRONG: It's been solid all the way through, and I don't think I've had -- one day I probably said something to them where I thought they didn't come out and just go to work where they're worrying too much about the temperature. And you think about it, we had, what, 13 straight days of 100-plus degrees out there and the guys were out there working and not even saying anything about it and going as hard as they possibly can. But competition helps you out with that because now when you have competition at certain positions, then guys know that they can't slack off and they know that they're going to have to go out and compete each and every day. But it's about getting better. The only way you're going to get better is guys got to be willing to work.

Q. Notre Dame has kind of that Yankee feel, love them or hate them. Did you feel the mystique when you were there for your time at Notre Dame, kind of that natural feel for that program?
CHARLIE STRONG: Yeah, it was a mystique about it, yes, but if you think about it, at that time they won a lot of games and they were the only team that had the NBC contract, so they were really the only team that everyone had a chance to go watch every Saturday, so that's why a lot of people had that jealousy. They were so jealous and hated Notre Dame, so how can they have their own TV contract. But then now the way it is, it has really changed, and college athletics

has changed, so now you see so much football, so that mystique, I'm not saying it's worn off, but everybody has got something about them.

Q. How different is standing here right now compared to one year ago going into the season opener, and also do you expect DeAndre to still get that first touch?

CHARLIE STRONG: Why do we have to go there? Was that recruiting talk? But I said he had to earn it to get that first touch. But when you look at it, a year ago I was really just still trying to figure out my team and not knowing how we were going to take the field. Now that you're a year into it you feel like you have a better feel for it. Even just the whole preparation, how they come about it. I was telling them, I was talking to them and I said, how you prepare to go win a game, I said, last year I didn't think that we prepared the right way to go win a game because you don't wake up on Saturday morning and say it's time to go play. It's got to come with confidence, but it also has got to come with guys who -- you've got to buy into it, and where you've got to put in the time. Just don't wait to come over here at 2:30 when we call meetings; you walk in the door and it's the first time -- you have a day off today on Monday, so come by the office, come in, and if you want to sit down with a coach, sit down with a coach. If you want to go downstairs and watch film on your own, but you've got to come in and do it. But the preparation is totally different now than it was a year ago.

Q. What makes you think that the offense will be better, and what makes you think that the team can handle adversity?

CHARLIE STRONG: I know when you talk about the offense and just how much better it's going to be, well, you have to be better just because of the number that played last year, and you look at an offensive line, you should be better because you have four of those guys back. You look at your quarterback, should be much better than he was a year ago. Then you look at the wide receiver, Daje has had an unbelievable camp, Marcus has had an unbelievable camp, Armanti. You've got three guys that can really stretch a defense. So you've just got to feel like you're going to be better. And then the adversity is going to hit us. We know it's going to hit us. Now, how we bounce back is going to depend on just how quickly and how mature we are. But it's going to fall on the coaches, too, just making sure that we keep this team, because you have such a young team that we're going to have to keep this team circled together and have to help them overcome anything that happens.

Q. Most of us are old enough to fully understand history of Notre Dame. Do you get the feeling that this generation of players was watching them a little bit, or do they appreciate what they're walking into on Saturday?
CHARLIE STRONG: They really do appreciate it because you think about it, we're at University of Texas and look what we have. We have 881 wins ourselves. But that's why I took them back and wanted to show them those clips last week each and every day where we talked about the Heisman winners here and the Heisman winners there, when we talked about the number of victories, talked about the big time victories, talked about the National Championships. But I just wanted to take them back so they could go back and just realize what they're stepping into and just how big this game is. A lot of times, you're right, when you're young you don't realize how big it is until you step on the field, and I didn't want when they hit the field for that -- all of a sudden for that to hit them, like, oh, my God, this is really something. I said, it's going to be special; it's under the lights, Saturday night in South Bend. It's only two teams that they're playing, us and USC, so it's a big game when you talk about two traditional programs because SC is no different than us, but they look at it as it's probably their two biggest games of the season, and they have them at night in South Bend.

Q. I don't want you to tell us specifically, but do you and Shawn have a plan in mind in terms of what specific theory Jerrod is going to come in? Has that been scripted out or are you going to play that by ear?
CHARLIE STRONG: So you want me to tell you my first play, too, huh? Yeah, there is a plan for when he's going to come in. There is. And he's going to get a chance -- he's going to play.

Q. Going into your second season, do you feel like the players have bought in now?
CHARLIE STRONG: Yeah, because now that we've been into it a year now and they understand who we are and we have a better feel for them and it continues to develop, and now that you have a whole new class coming in so they feel like those are our guys. Any time you walk into a program, those are our players, whether we recruited them or not recruited them, they're here because it's The University of Texas. They're not here because of us, but they wanted to come here, so it's all about us making sure that we continue to develop them, nurture them and let them become a part of us.

Q. You've had struggles on the offensive line last year, and you talked about Connor Williams and Patrick Vahe, starters as freshmen on the offensive line

now, but you have more guys there. What do you think about the depth, the five behind the front side and how much they might be able to contribute?
CHARLIE STRONG: And that's what's been better for us. We've been able to develop another five, a group behind them, and so now with the offensive line -- and you know they're going to get tired. We're knowing that those starting five at some point is going to get tired, so now when we bring in that second group, can they come in and go move the football, and that's what we've got to have enough confidence and believe in them that they will. But we have a set; now it's just about us putting them out there and watching them go to work.

Q. Coach, Hassan Ridgeway is not on the two-deep? Does that have anything to do with Hassan's health?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, Ridgeway came in and he was injured, banged up a little, so that's the only reason why. But I told Coach [Brick] Haley, I said, with that defensive front, you look at Poona [Ford], you look at [Paul] Boyette, you look at Shiro [Davis], you look at Bryce [Cottrell], who's had an unbelievable camp, you talk about Tank, we've got guys there, Ridgeway, we have a bunch of guys there, even Derick Roberson is a guy who's stepping up and who's coming along. But we have many who -- I said to them, you have about eight or nine guys that you can go play up front right now and you feel pretty good about playing them.

Q. How much thought went into not doing a Friday walk-through, and are you concerned that they might be blown away when they walk out and see the whole field?
CHARLIE STRONG: No. What happens on a Friday walk-through, we would have had to leave here at like 9:00 in the morning, and there's a specific window that they give you where we would have had to be there at either like 1:00, so then we would have come in there, they'd run us off, then they come in and they take the field at a certain time, so that's why we weren't able to go do the Friday walk-through, because now you're talking about now they're not going to class at all here. But that's why I've been trying to just show them just what's going on. Another thing is on Fridays there, the campus is just so full of people because you would love to put them on campus and let them walk around, but there's people everywhere because they have their Friday night pep rally, they have the mass before the pep rally, so much going on on that campus, and I didn't want them to be placed in that environment. Then you hear a lot of chatter going back and forth because I don't want our guys chattering with their fans and hearing all that. So it's the best thing sometimes to just walk into a ballpark. I just told them, you know what, guys, the field is the same length, it's the same width. The people are different, now it's all about us going in to go play.

Q. One more quarterback question. Tyrone clearly impressed the coaches. Are you convinced he's won over the locker room?
CHARLIE STRONG: I'm convinced he's won over the locker room, just the way he's played and how he really have came on and just his leadership ability right now. Even the players will tell you that. He's won -- I've said that, the guy that wins the quarterback position has to win over this team, and he's won over the team. It's going to be fun to watch him.

Q. What did Armanti Foreman do to win that starting job, and what have you seen in terms of his growth?
CHARLIE STRONG: Armanti, even through the summer conditioning came in and got a lot bigger and a lot stronger, and the only thing he does when he gets bigger and stronger, his speed, the thing, he's got a lot faster. But a guy that can make plays, and a guy that can stretch the defense. He has so much speed. I don't know if he really realizes how fast he is because sometimes Tyrone will lay a ball out, and you don't think he'll go get it, and all of a sudden he runs underneath it. But he's a guy that continues to improve and has become vocal. But I think that what has really helped him is D'Onta, where his brother has come on, and he's playing well. So now you can see with both of those guys, and you look at two twins, they're both seeing that they are contributing, and they're having a lot of fun.

Q. D'Onta played more than Armanti last year.
CHARLIE STRONG: Really he did, so now you've got D'Onta who's really come on. So I think that Armanti has really stepped up his game.

Q. Were you guys maybe able to pinpoint what happened to you guys in the third quarter of games last year, specifically offensively?
CHARLIE STRONG: Any time you look at just your offense and why last year there were so many collapses, you've got to have playmakers. Your quarterback position has got to play well, but you've got to have enough guys around him to play well, also, and we didn't have enough guys around him to play well. And so when that happens to you, then there's going to be where you go in and then you don't move the ball, then defensively you go out and you give up a big play, and you give up a touchdown. Now you're playing from behind the chains, and now you're going to play catch-up and things start collapsing and start running downhill on you. We've just got to be smarter. It's why it's key for us where we have to run the football. We couldn't do that last year. We have to run the ball, because if you run the football, you can control the clock and then you don't put

everything on the quarterback. I told our guys, let's not ask our quarterbacks to win the game. We don't need them to -- there's enough guys around them to help him win the game. Let's make sure we get them to help to win.