

University of Texas Football Media Conference

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Charlie Strong

COACH STRONG: Happy to get the win on Saturday night. So much room for improvement.

Defensively we have to get off the field on third down. We call that the money down. What's happening right now is too many conversions, whether it be missed sacks, pressure, missing tackles. Just have to do a better job overall defensively.

Offensively, didn't know, just because of the number of snaps we got. Very pleased the way Jerrod came out and competed, played well. If you look at the first drive, we knew he was someone that could beat you with his feet once he got going and was able to scramble around and get a big first down, two plays later throw a touchdown pass.

Always room for improvement and we know we have to get better. Going into this week, facing an unbelievable Cal team, up-tempo. We know the quarterback is an outstanding player, can make the throws. We have to get better and work on our fundamentals this week and get ready to go play this game.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. What do you feel is going wrong on the defense?

COACH STRONG: We got to help them. I did brag about it. What's happening right now is here getting so many three-man rushes, we got to bring a fourth rusher. If you watch, Ridgeway got a lot of pressure in the middle.

Then Tank has come in. I don't know if he's actually at 100%. He's playing hard, but it's a matter of him having confidence in the foot where he can

get that foot in the ground.

Then we have to win outside with Sheroid, Naashon and Bryce. We have to win on the outside, which we're not doing.

We're just allowing too much time in the pocket. Also with our gaps, we're not staying fundamentally sound where they got control.

Q. Is something wrong with Derick Roberson? Can he play?

COACH STRONG: You have Naashon and Roberson who is doing a good job. He didn't play on Saturday, but he played in the Notre Dame game. He just got to keep coming and you'll get a chance to watch him play this week.

Q. When they're running straight at you, they're attacking your pride. Did you get in their pride?

COACH STRONG: What you can't allow a team to do is turn around and hand the ball off. Where they were attacking us was inside the A and B guy, ran just right downhill. They're not trying to get the ball outside, they're attacking us just down the middle. We always talk about being good down the middle. We weren't very good the other night. We never established ourselves and got our feet in the ground.

We allowed the defenders to get into our bodies, which you can't do. Once they get into the bodies, we never extended off.

Q. A lot of people are asking why has it taken Jerrod so long to get on the field with what he showed right off the bat. Did he show you something Saturday night he hadn't showed at practice?

COACH STRONG: Well, it's just a second game, so you got a chance to see him a little in the first game, then started the second one. They had a chance to see him. So he played very well for us.

Q. How do you continue to ride this momentum?

COACH STRONG: Well, it's all about consistency. What you have to look at, too, you can play a really good opponent and we have to be ready to go play Cal. Cal is a little different than Rice. They're going to be up-tempo, they score a lot of points. If we do give up the points, can we go match the

score? That's going to be key. Offensively can we go down and match it?

Q. Malik Jefferson, what has he done that you want to put him out there?

COACH STRONG: With Malik, he's one of those guys, he came in in January, so he's been here. Went through spring practice. The reason why is he's so much more mature for his age and he's playing very well for us right now. If you look at us on defense, you're always talking about being good down the middle. He's a middle backer right now. He's established himself very well. He's a young man, he knows how to work and he knows how to go about his business.

Q. Can you describe your frustration level defensively?

COACH STRONG: The frustrating thing about defense right now is we talked about our front. What we're doing is we're allowing -- we're not making them one dimensional at all. They're having to balance the attack with their run game and pass game.

We had opportunities the other night. So many missed tackles. I think we had like eight missed sacks. One time we had four people miss him on one sack. Then we get him pinned to the boundary on their side, we miss.

It just comes back to fundamentals and technique. When a defense is called, just execute the defense. But believe in yourself and have confidence.

Malik rushes one time. He says, Coach, I went down thinking he's going to run inside. No, he wasn't going to go inside at all. The quarterback wasn't going back in the middle, he was going to fake like he was, try to get you back to the outside. That's all he did all night long.

It's frustration. We can play better than we played on defense. They ran 96 plays. The one group we put in in the end, you guys complain about not playing, you get your opportunity to play, you let them drive the ball down twice and score. Let's not complain about not playing. When you take the field, I expect you to play at the ability you have.

Q. What is your perception of the (lack of) time of possession?

COACH STRONG: I know they had the ball a long time. The time of possession, if you look at it, we make them punt, we score, so we score quickly. They take the ball and drive. Then we get another big, long return. Our offense, with Daje scoring one, Duke has a long return, we take two plays to go score. But they held the ball. That's because they converted on third down, too. They went something like 13 of 21 on third down. They had 21 opportunities to get a first down.

Q. Have you been pleased with what Jeff Traylor has done with the special teams unit?

COACH STRONG: Jeff is doing an unbelievable job with the special teams. It's something we focus on every day. We have spent a lot of times this season just working on special teams because we have dynamic returner in Daje.

We also have some coverage guys with those freshmen. You watch, too, Boyd run down on kickoff coverage, you watch 26, Colbert. You have a certain number of core guys, Colbert, it's Mercado, it's Antwuan Davis, Kris Boyd. I had Templin. I have a core of guys. That's their job. I tell them, That's your role right now, is special teams. They have really taken it on. Even De La Torre.

They feel good about our special teams improving and getting better.

Q. What advice do you have for Jerrod this weekend?

COACH STRONG: The thing for Jerrod is not to get so overwhelmed, just continue to focus, continue to stay locked in, just make sure that it's all about California, and you're improving from game one to game two, the next game.

Swoopes is handling it well. He's a competitor. With him it's all about he's got to get an opportunity, he's going to get another opportunity. So just continue to improve and get better yourself.

Q. Do you have a favorite Foreman twin? What do you like about these guys?

COACH STRONG: The two Foreman twins, D'Onta, because D'Onta works. I

always tell him, he has a lot of ability, he just doesn't play up to his level. But D'Onta, it's all about work for him. Big old strong physical back, runs behind his pads. He's hard to tackle once you get him in the open field.

The thing about Cal, up-tempo offense, they can score a lot of points. Quarterback does a great job of releasing the ball. His receivers do a great job of catching it. Our hands are going to be full covering the back end. We have to be ready to go play.

Q. How do you get to (California QB) Jared Goff?

COACH STRONG: Well, the thing with Goff, we hope we can keep him corralled better than we did (Rice QB Driphus) Jackson. He's not going to scramble around like Jackson. Jackson can come out the backdoor with you.

Goff is one of those guys, he sits in the pocket and he's going to release the ball. It's more of us getting up the field, keeping him in front of us. We can't give him the time. He will find an open receiver and he can let it go.

Q. As a defensive guy, with young guys, how do you rationalize it with the chunk plays (given up on defense)?

COACH STRONG: If you look at it, it's not many young guys out there. I look in the back end of the secondary, at the bunker corner position. Antwuan is doing a good job of holding his ground.

Duke is playing a lot of nickel. The two safeties are back. The junk plays with the passing game should never happen. You should never get the ball thrown up over your head for 60 yards up to 30 yards. That should never happen in the back end.

The run game is what's eating us up right now. What we're not doing is we're not winning on first down. It ends up being a second-and-five, a second-and-three, a second-and-two. That's where we're not winning right now. We have to win on first down.

When we do get it to third down, if we're going to play coverage, we have to play coverage and cover them. We're not winning one-on-ones right now. I tell them all the time, You can't be a shock absorber, go in there and

get stuck to a blocker. Let's get off the blocks and go win, apply the pressure.

Q. Anything you look to change this week in regard to ball control?

COACH STRONG: When you run the football, you can control it, you can have ball control. You have to be able to run the ball. That's what we have to focus on.

The thing about Cal is their defense has improved, but they've given up a lot of points on defense. So what we need to do is we do need to control the ball and just make sure. I know it's a spread offense, but we got to play better on defense, too. We have to give our offense some opportunities. 37 snaps, we get off the field on third down, we're going to give them more opportunities to go take the ball also.

Q. Do you have to maybe put Malik on the outside to blitz a little bit more?

COACH STRONG: What we did the other night, you still have Ridgeway who can go both inside and outside. Chris Nelson ended up getting a sack. So you have the bodies inside if he's not 100%. We have to win outside with Sheroid, with Naashon, with Bryce, Roberson, whoever it is. Whoever our outside rushers are, that's where we have to win.

Inside you have enough guys you can move them around, put them in place. But outside you have to keep edge pressure on the quarterback and force him to step up. When you make him step up, the inside pressure should be able to absorb it.

Q. What has happened between fall camp and now with the (defensive) linemen?

COACH STRONG: Well, I still have them. I got to get them to play. They're still sitting there. We just got to do a better job. You look at it, like I said, it's about making a team one-dimensional, and that's what we haven't done.

If you're going to load the box and stop the run, you got to be ready to go play the pass. Right now we're loading the box, allowing them to run the ball, and they're throwing it.

Q. Is Jerrod (Heard) a different player from practices to games?

COACH STRONG: The thing about Jerrod is he has so much confidence. He always has had it. A lot of things just don't really bother him. Sometimes you can get the wrong impression with him because you may look at him and think that he's not really focused or locked in, really doesn't care, when he does. That's just who he is. His whole personality is like that. Even with the guys he hangs around, their personality is like that.

You can look at him and say, Man, is he really ready to go play? Because he even came up to me on Saturday and he says, All right, coach, we're going to go get this, watch me go out there and get these boys. We'll see.

He's just one of those guys that I think sometimes with guys, when the lights come on, it's like they even take a step up, which he does. It's almost like, Okay, the lights are brighter, so I'm going to go shine. Everybody's going to watch me shine.

Q. With Cal being the last non-conference game, what do you want to see specifically?

COACH STRONG: We need to go play well. We got to play well on defense. The thing about it, you got to play defense. They will have the confidence going into the conference play because when you open up conference, you're going to open up with a really good Oklahoma State team.

Offensively you want to move the football, continue to improve, just get better.

Just overall as a team we have to get better. We're nowhere near where we should be.

Q. Is there any update on Devonaire Clarington?

COACH STRONG: No, I think he took the test, but we haven't heard anything back yet.

Q. I don't want to belabor the past too much. How did it take Jerrod 15 games to get on the field?

COACH STRONG: I don't think this time last year he was ready to go play. You think about a freshman walking in. I don't think he was. I mean, when we walked into it last year, he walked into it with Ash and Tyrone. Then you let Tyrone go play. But he was not ready.

Q. You made such a big investment in Daje.

COACH STRONG: It was fun watching him. You're right, he's been through so much. The thing about him is even when he wasn't doing what he should have been doing, he still stuck to it, did everything we asked him to do.

I think about this time last season, you think about it, he was suspended game after game after game, but he still kept working, kept working. Put him on scout team. Never complained. Just went about his business.

He told me, Coach, I will show you I will be the guy you want me to be.

Well, you have to prove it to us. You have the ability, son, everything it takes. It's more of you, yourself, waiting for you to go and take the right step and go in the right direction.

I'm not going to give up on you. I'll be the number one guy that will be happy for you. I didn't change your step, you changed it. You did it yourself. You made an effort to do everything we asked you to do.

You watch him go out there the other night, it was really big to see him return those punts. Even in the Notre Dame game, he was one guy that really showed up where you felt a presence, you felt like there's a guy out there on the field competing.

Q. Some have projected (Cal QB) Jared Goff as a first round draft pick. Does he have Aaron Rodgers' talent?

COACH STRONG: He's tall, can release the ball, make the throws. He can make the difficult throws. A lot of times you see him throw the ball in the coverage, but somehow the receiver comes down with it. That's why our hands are full, we know we can't give him a window. If you give him a window, he'll make the throw and it's going to be completed.

It's all about us getting the pressure, we make sure we move his feet in the pocket. Don't allow him to stand there. Make him move his feet and make him uncomfortable. We have to dictate the flow of the game.

Q. Is it important for you to try to get some stability to have them understand?

COACH STRONG: What you have to do on offense is find a way to get the ball into your play-makers' hands.

You're right, a lot of times you can't run a play. There's a reason why you run a play now, who you're trying to get the ball to, whose hands do you want the ball in? Starting of the second half, we said, John Burt is one-on-one, to the boundary is playing one-on-one, safety is dropping down. They're playing man coverage, release the ball and let him outrun the guy. He's athletic enough where he'll beat the guy one-on-one. Release it down the field and beat the guy one-on-one.

It's all about finding those play-makers and getting the ball in their hand, spreading them out, because the guys are getting enough touches. We knew we had to get touches for J. Gray, John Burt, because he can make it happen. Armanti can make it happen on the outside. Daje can make it happen. But you have enough guys, now it's a matter of spreading it around. You got to get the ball in the right guy's hands.

Q. Technique-wise, is there any adjustment for the guys on the defensive line?

COACH STRONG: Yeah, what needs to happen, like I said, we've been playing so much three down. A lot of times when you play three down, you're trying to eat up the inside gaps. If you wind them out a little, get them out on the edge a little, let them jet up the field, it will change for some of them. Ridgeway is that type of player. Ridgeway is one of those types of guys, you tell him to just come off the football, press the guy off of you, just knock him back.

It's going to be our defensive front, we're going to have to play some on the outside and make sure when we can beat the one-on-one blocks, that's what's key, can we beat the one-on-one blocks.

Q. When you install a new quarterback and a new (indiscernible) in the same week, is it a matter of them getting comfortable with each other?

COACH STRONG: What we didn't have to do, we didn't have to change the offense. When we say that, Jerrod has heard the calls. The calls, he's heard before. Now we have to make it where you limit it, you want to make sure where the package is suited to him, there's things there that he can do. He's a guy that can beat you with his legs. You can open up the quarterback game, run the game with him, the power game, all those things that will help Jerrod. It gives him more confidence.

You think about the other night when he took off with that ball. I think that gave him some confidence when he had the long run. Two plays later he releases the ball for a touchdown, throws the long one to Armanti. Those are the things that will get him going.

One thing about a rush with him, if you rush him and he breaks you down, then he's off and running. Once he's off and running, there's not a lot of guys are going to catch him. In the open field, he'll make a guy miss. They're going to have to run him down.

Q. I know you're not happy with the defense. In the first two games, what grade would you give them?

COACH STRONG: Trying to make me rate my guys? I'm a defensive coach so I can't give them a grade.

I said to our defense this morning, We have to play better and improve. In a plan to win, you have to play great defense. That's the first thing you have to do. You have to play great defense, and we haven't done that.

Q. Can you take us through how the play calls were going from the booth?

COACH STRONG: When you're on the headset, they're all communicating. You hear somebody, First-and-10. Jay has something what he's thinking. Everybody's a part of it. Even with Shawn being there, Jeff on there, everybody's talking. Even at the end of a series, you get it all together, everybody is on the headset saying, Listen, this is what you have to think about this series because this is what they're giving. It's all predicated on

what the secondary is giving you.

Even when Rice, they was bringing more pressure than they brought. When they bring a lot of field pressure, either you're going to throw into coverage or you're going to throw away from it. They started dropping down to the boundary. That's when you had the one-on-one to the outside.

It all depends on what the defense is giving you, then everybody is talking, everybody have ideas. Once they get settled down, Hey, this is what we can set, this is really what we have, this is the package, the plays that we can call.

Q. How has Jerrod Heard improved?

COACH STRONG: Well, this is game one. We just got to make sure he continues to improve also and just continues to get better. One game doesn't make him. I want to make sure it's a steady improvement game by game. It's going to be gradual.

There's going to be some bumps and bruising for him. We know that's going to happen. But it's got to be one where as a coach, we need to keep him in the right scheme and make sure he can do the things he can do.

Q. I know Jerrod did the push-ups, but does he expose himself sometimes on the run?

COACH STRONG: Sideline is not a bad thing and he needs to learn how to slide. He doesn't know how to slide yet. He needs to learn how to slide and get down. You watch that one, you watch the out of bounds where the guy undercuts him, he slips on the sideline. He needs to learn how to protect himself. I don't want to see us lose him because he's scrambling around thinking he can make a move on someone and he goes down.

Thank you.

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