

Texas Football Press Conference - Sept. 21, 2015

(transcript courtesy of ASAP Sports)

Charlie Strong

COACH STRONG: It was a tough loss the other night. The thing about it, if you watch how our team fought back, we are very proud of them. The thing it can do is make us stronger, make them just believing in themselves.

I told them that after the game in the locker room. I said, What's amazing is to watch how we fought back, 21 down in the third quarter and for us to go on that run in the fourth quarter, score two touchdowns within three or four minutes at the end.

The amazing performance by Jerrod was just unbelievable. You see it a lot. You don't want that to be overshadowed because he played an unbelievable game.

We just go to work this week, get better, have a really good Oklahoma State team coming in. We have to get ready back, get our team back and focused and get them ready to play.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. On defense, is it a matter of changing out personnel? Some guys not able to control their gaps?

COACH STRONG: No, it's not that at all. If you look, the one run before half, we actually missed the tackle. You see guys that are coming in on the ball. When you attack it from the secondary, you got to keep it in front. The running back kind of got lost in the pile, so he ends up bouncing out. Too far inside.

On the 76-yard run, it was a guy up his gap but once it breaks the line of scrimmage, we're in zone coverage, so all eyes should be on the ball. We just don't make the play. It's more of a fundamental technique breakdown that can be corrected.

Q. We've seen it with spread teams over the years, Tech, Baylor, offense is great, defense struggles. Is this how it is in college football?

COACH STRONG: No, it shouldn't be like that. I look at us. We had a stretch there where if you go the last two series of the first half, the touchdown, field goal, then the first three series of the third quarter, touchdown, touchdown, touchdown. It's all mistakes that we're making. It's nothing that they're doing. We're doing it to ourselves.

You watch the play, we were up by 10, the crowd was into it, we really have it going, then we give up the long run. All of a sudden there's a throw for a touchdown. We come back, turn the ball over, they have a short field, kick a field goal.

The second half, big plays. You have to make a team drive the ball. We didn't make them drive a

ball. The big plays, a pass or a run, that can't happen.

I told them, 11-, 12-play drives, they're patient enough to do it. They can strike in three or four plays. You look at us on offense, that's what we're doing. Jerrod was running around, striking in three or four plays. That puts pressure back on the defense.

Q. Before the Rice game, you said you weren't sure if you were going to start Jerrod Heard. You made that decision before the game. Now that you've seen what he's done, are you at all shocked?

COACH STRONG: I was never unsure. I just said that (laughter).

But, no, I always felt like this with Jerrod. You just don't know what you're going to get sometimes. You walk out there at practice, you watch him practice sometimes, it's like, Wow!

You throw him out there in the game, the things he does, when he goes back, he knows this, if I can't find a receiver, I know I can take off with it, make people miss in the open field. He has the athletic ability where he can do it.

He won two state championships at the 6A level. For him to be a competitor the way he is, I'm not surprised at all.

Q. He didn't look that good in practice?

COACH STRONG: It wasn't that he didn't look good in practice, he just wasn't placed in a situation where he was in the game. Now once you put him out there in the game, I said, Let's play him. What do we have to lose? Let's play him and watch him go play.

Q. You're not the only defense that's struggling.

COACH STRONG: I just go back. I look at the plays that hurt us, and they're plays that can be fixed. It's always a missed assignment. It's always poor tackling. Coverage principles where a guy isn't in the right coverage zone. Those are things that can be fixed because it's all about fundamentals and technique.

I told our defensive coaches if we get those things straight, we're going to be okay. It's something we have to get fixed and we have to get it fixed right away.

Q. With what you've seen out of your team so far, do you think you can be a factor in the championship game or trying to get to a bowl game?

COACH STRONG: I'm just trying to get to that next one, Oklahoma State.

Our goal is to win the conference. That's one of our goals. We're going to go out and compete each and every week. For us, it starts this week with Oklahoma State. We know we have to go play well because it's a really outstanding football team.

Our mindset is to go out and go win the conference.

Q. Would you have gone for two or are you certain that Nick Rose would knock it down?

COACH STRONG: I'm 100% certain that Nick would knock it down. You're looking at it, it's 1:11 left in the game. I wasn't going to go for 2. The crowd was in it. Just go get a stop. If anything, get it into overtime.

Nick has been knocking it down, so I have a lot of confidence in him.

Q. Updates on Jason Hall or Chris Warren III?

COACH STRONG: J. Hall, both of them should be back in practice tomorrow when we go. We practiced on Sunday. He just did a lot of running around. Both of those guys should be ready to go.

Q. Edwin Freeman going to be okay? Seemed like Jerrod before the last drive might have said something.

COACH STRONG: He said, Don't tell Alex (laughter). No, I'm just kidding.

I think we got to take a look at him (Freeman) today, so we'll get more information on him.

The last drive, I forgot how much time was actually on the clock. I think we were shooting around 1:50, 1:54, somewhere in there. I said, We're out of timeouts. I said, It's like practice now. We practice those situations where a lot of times I give 1 minute 10, you got to go score a touchdown. He said, Coach, I got it now.

We need to go win this thing.

I'm going to get you a touchdown.

I wanted to make sure, Whatever you do, do not call a timeout because I have zero left.

Q. Seems like Kai Locksley will be running a lot of the same plays that Jerrod might be running. Might change if Tyrone came back in the game.

COACH STRONG: Tyrone, he can run the offense. It's just certain plays we have for Jerrod that we do not have for Tyrone. He can run the offense. Just hoping that we don't have to get in that situation where you say, We're going to need Kai Locksley. If something were to happen to Jerrod, we would take it into strong consideration and see what we need to do offensively.

Q. How has your conversation been with (UT interim AD) Mike (Perrin) so far?

COACH STRONG: It's been great with Mike. I've met Mike. I spoke to the chancellor's council twice. We've been introduced before. Met him before he was the AD. He's going to do a great job, he really is.

Q. What did you say to Nick (Rose) to get his mind off of the game? Where is his mindset now?

COACH STRONG: For the first time I saw a team that really actually took a loss the way they should take it. It hurt a lot of the players.

So after the game, even on Saturday night, I'm walking back through the locker room, he's still

sitting in there. I sit with him. We talked till 12:30, 1:00. I said to him, There's going to be battles and struggles in life and adversity that happen to you in your life. It's over with. You can't relive this moment. We're going to get an opportunity. It's going to be a tight game down the stretch. You're going to go out there and you're going to go bang a 50-yarder and we're going to win the game.

I called him Sunday morning, before he came in, asked him how he was doing. He said, I'm feeling a little bit better.

The great thing is the team has rallied around him. A lot of the guys have really tried to pick him up.

I told our team, We can't put it on his shoulders. Shouldn't have gotten to that point. If we took care of our business on offense and defense, that never would have happened.

Q. As a defensive guy, can you reconcile that you can't keep teams off the board?

COACH STRONG: Yeah, what's really tough now is you're just so wide open, you're right. 10 years ago it was three yards and a cloud of dust, people hoping they could get a 20-19 game.

When I was looking at our goals, we were talking about a scoring average of holding a team to 20 points or less which is really hard now because of the way the game has changed so much.

You have to go in and make people drive the ball. The big plays are where teams are hurting us now right now because we're giving up so many. I think we gave up nine on Saturday. Big play with a runs, 15 or yards or more, with the passes 20 or more. We gave up nine of them.

Q. I wouldn't be asking this if not for the opponent. Joe Wickline issue still hasn't gone away. Now they are threatening to want to interview Swoopes in a deposition. Have you talked about making this go away?

COACH STRONG: No, we haven't. I think Mike (Perrin) will handle it the right way. We're so into football right now. Joe hasn't showed where it has affected him at all. When it comes down to it, we got to make our team better, be concerned about what we've got and what's happening here.

Q. When you look at Oklahoma State, what is the biggest thing that (Mason) Rudolph does?

COACH STRONG: You know what he does, he does a great job of just managing the offense. You watch that offense, he gets the ball in the right people's hands. He controls the game. That's why they're playing so well right now, because of the job that he's doing.

Just breaking it down, it's going to be a tough game for us because of the quarterback and what he's done.

Q. What did you think of Kevin Vaccaro's defense?

COACH STRONG: When he came into the game, we get that target. He comes into the game, he's always been a big hitter. He doesn't always wrap-up. Even at practice, he will hit you. He

caused that fumble early, that one drive where we were able to get the ball, stop them from scoring.

He played well, to be thrown into it. What I try to tell our players all the time, every game we're going to need someone to come off the bench. In this game we needed two players to come off the bench with him and P.J. on defense. You have to be ready, prepare yourself like you're a starter.

If he hadn't prepared himself like a starter, there is no way he would have played like he played. He played really well for us.

But it was just fun to watch him go out and compete.

Q. Any chance he could get that role?

COACH STRONG: Right now, we're going to get Haines back for sure, then with J. Hall, we'll see how that works out.

Q. Can you characterize your relationship with Steve Patterson? Did your relationship deteriorate down the stretch?

COACH STRONG: He supported me 100%. He did a job here. He was called on to do a job here. You know what, he's going to support this athletic program. He did a great job of supporting it.

Q. A question about the secondary. Seems like on certain plays, eight yards back, some back pedaling. Are you guys going to try to be a little more aggressive?

COACH STRONG: It depends on who the player is and how much confidence he has in his ability. Kris Boyd, he won't back off anybody. He'll press the whole time. It just depends on who the player is. Plus it depends on who you lineup receiver-wise. We knew the receiver from Cal was a really good player. No question.

You watch the throw on the sideline, it was a jump ball. He jumps up over Vaccaro and takes it from him. There's going to be times when we're going to press and there's going to be times when we back up.

In zone coverage, you have to have your eyes on the ball, need to back off. When it's man, you get up to the guy and challenge him.

Q. How much improvement have you seen in the offensive line?

COACH STRONG: The offensive line is getting better each and every week, game by game. Connor Williams, he's no longer a freshman. He's grown into it. You started now, so you continue to improve and get better with Perk (Kent Perkins), even Sed (Sedrick Flowers) and Taylor Doyle.

But Jerrod also helps you out. It breaks down. If they miss a block, he can make a guy miss and he can take off with it.

That's what you're going to start finding out with teams now. You may not get the full all-out rush that we've been getting. Even with California, he was good enough where he could beat them. He could get one guy one-on-one, it's over with. That's the thing he can do.

That's what you'll probably start seeing. You'll see the rush slow down. It's going to be an all-out rush where they spot the quarterback, or they'll back off hoping that if it does break down, he doesn't come out of there running.

Q. At the end of the game the fans were showing you a lot of love. How much does that help you feel like you have that fan base back?

COACH STRONG: I mean, it was amazing to see our fans in there, just so happy at the end of the game. Usually what happens, you think about us, in the third quarter we were 21 down, would have spilled out of there. All of a sudden you see the score in the fourth quarter. Then we get stopped on the fourth down play, they still stayed.

Energized, the excitement. Our players were into it. You could just see how they were feeding off the crowd. Even the third down play where the guy goes down the middle, fumbles the ball, then we make the big hit, the ball comes spilling out.

It was exciting to feel our fans. That's what it's all about, this is their football team. We need them just as much as they need us. We probably need them more than they need us. We need them in the seats yelling for us because that just exciting our players.

Q. Second half there were some crucial penalties. How much of a deterrent is that?

COACH STRONG: I address it. That should never happen from a vet, personal foul calls. That hurts us, really hurts our offense, especially when we have to go backwards. Those are things that have to be corrected. Just undisciplined. You can't allow those things. We cannot allow those things to happen.

Q. You talked a lot last year about moving guys to the outside receiver slot, how impressed have you been with guys like Armanti Foreman and John Burt?

COACH STRONG: Well, you have guys that can take the top off of a defense when you talk about Burt, he's so athletic and can run. He adjusted on the long throw. Jerrod under throw it, but he adjusts, goes and makes the play.

Armanti, he doesn't know how fast he is. He can go track a ball. It's funny when you watch him. He'll wait for the ball to be thrown before he puts it into top gear. He's kind of coasting, then he'll take off and go get it.

When we get seven back, he's another guy that can take the top off. And then Daje is always exciting when he gets the ball in his hands.

You have some threats on the outside and guys that can take the ball the distance, they can make people miss in the open field and go score.

Q. I know you emphasize the fundamentals. Anything in particular in the third quarter?

COACH STRONG: It was all fundamentals that third quarter where we're giving up the 21 points, then we don't move the ball on offense. We just have to get better and improve.

Q. How nice is it to see the mindset of the team starting to change? Before when they were down 21, you wouldn't see the team fight back like that.

COACH STRONG: No, you wouldn't. That's what's great. That's what we talked about. At some point it's got to be pride. There's a foundation already been laid here, and it's up to us to continue to fight. We have to fight. We can't just give in.

To watch us battle back, keep battling back. Then when your quarterback go make plays, your guys get more confident. Now the defense knows we got to get a stop to get the ball back for him. We get the ball back for him, it's going to be exciting to watch him do something with it, which happened on Saturday.

They feel if they can get a stop, get the ball back, Jerrod can take the ball down the field and get the score.

Q. How are the twins [Armanti and De'Onta] contributing to the offense this year?

COACH STRONG: Well, you look at the big run D'Onta had, a 33-yard run there. We were down 14. Got it down to 7. But both of those guys are contributing. They're playing very well. D'Onta is just a big power back, can run downhill. He has enough speed where if he gets to the outside, he can outrun you. He's just getting better and better. Almost like they're feeding off one another. One scores, the next one want to score. Nice to see that friendly competition.

Q. Daje (Johnson), how much do you need him to get to maximize his play-making ability?

COACH STRONG: Well, I think on Saturday, he had four or five catches for, what, right at 150, or close to that. The kicking game is where I want to see him touch that ball. They made it a point, left their offense out there, let their kicker kind of pooch the ball down the field, couldn't get him out there. In the return game, they found out where he was, kicked it away from him.

Good thing about this conference, they'll kick it to him. We'll watch him. They'll kick it to him. We just have to go down the field and block for them. I think they'll kick it to him (laughter).

Q. Are you worried about Johnathan Gray?

COACH STRONG: Really, I'm not. The thing about J. Gray, he's doing so much for us right now. If you watch, he's on punt team, kickoff return team, then on offense. He's doing a lot because he's involved in the special teams. But he wanted to be involved in special teams.

But you have two backs that can help each other, even with 25, Chris Warren. You have three running backs that you can kind of spill, rush them, keep them fresh. The key thing for us is to keep those guys fresh.

Q. Do you think at all about the big picture, months talking about offense, do you allow yourself to think that team may be set?

COACH STRONG: Now we got to fix the other piece (laughter).

Yes, I think we just got so caught up in the last play where we missed the field goal that we lost sight of how well the offense did play, and even Jerrod, how well he played. I was sitting there after the game. I was like, Wow, he put on a show out there.

So much went into the missed extra point. Oh, my God. I actually didn't see it. I turned and was walking down the sideline. I was looking at Vance. I was saying to Vance, it's 1:11. We have to stop these guys. We can't let them go down and score. No timeouts. I think they was working with two at the time. Vance said, It doesn't matter, you better get your kickoff team ready to go.

What?

He just missed it.

I turned and saw the player running. I was like, oh.

Q. (Question regarding Cal player not getting ejected.)

COACH STRONG: I walked out there and said to the official, I walked out there, kind of just laid on the guy. It wasn't where he goes in and throws his body into him. Their guy almost snatches my guy's head.

Coach, he wasn't really trying to do that.

I said something to him, but...

I just thought that it could have been looked at a little differently.

Q. You told the story after the Notre Dame game talking to a recruit. After a game like this, is it easier to get on the phone and talk to guys?

COACH STRONG: Well, the guys just see a bright future. You look on defense, right now Malik is a pressure. On offense. Jerrod is a pressure. They see so many young players. It's not hard because they see so many young players, they just see them playing. That's what a lot of guys do, they want to play their freshman year. That's what's exciting.

Thank you.