Texas Football Media Availability
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*transcripts courtesy of ASAP Sports

Charlie Strong

CHARLIE STRONG: It's going to be a big challenge this week. TCU is a very good football team. I think they're No. 3 or No. 4 in the polls. The thing we're going to have to do is just go out this week and make sure the preparation -- we have to be on point because in order for us to go forward and play an unbelievable game. We're going to have to start -- has to start tomorrow.

The last two we've been in the games, we just haven't been able to finish and we have to finish those games. Our guys have a really good attitude. They've worked hard. They've played hard. But it's just a matter of making plays at the right time and just staying focused and having the whole approach to the game.

Q. Obviously kind of the same result the last two weeks, but how did your team handle it and was it different? How did you communicate with them the second week?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, I said to them after the game, I said, if you think about us, guys, you look at the two opponents we've played the last two weeks and look where we are and just how far we've come; it's our own fault that we've been in the position we're in. We have to learn how to just go close out games. Everybody has a job to do, and just do your job and just keep battling, keep competing.

Q. How many plays do you plan to submit to the Big 12 office for review?
CHARLIE STRONG: I'm not exactly for sure on that. Just, you know what, the officials officiate and coaches coach, and we've just got to do a better job. It wasn't the outcome that had an effect on that game. We've just got to do a better job.

Q. Sometimes do you just feel unlucky?
CHARLIE STRONG: I don't always -- but you know what, a lot of times we've got to create our own, and we've got to create plays. You look at it, you look at that game there on Saturday, and we have our chances. We don't have a dropped ball here and then just them making a stop, we take the will out of them to take the ball -- the opening two drives and drive it down the field and get scores. If we stop them there, then we give them the 98-yard drive there in the third quarter where it was a big -- where we get it to 3rd down, and if we just get off the field on 3rd down and they have to punt.

There's a short field and then we're going to be able to go drive it. Then we throw the double pass, and it's just maybe a half a yard where we just get that completed and there's a score there. But we had our opportunities.

Q. Do you wonder when you're going to get a break?
CHARLIE STRONG: I don't know. We've just got to keep working. It'll come some day.

Q. The defense obviously played a lot better this week. There were some great adjustments in the second half. Talk about that a little bit.
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, we have so much youth on defense, and that's no excuse because I tell them now that they're no longer freshmen, they're upperclassmen, so you just have to go compete and play well.

The opening two drives they took the ball, just marched it right down the field, and once we got settled down and started playing well up front -- Ridgeway played unbelievable. He's able to control the line of scrimmage, and it was big when he got that turnover and then taking it for the score. But he had big sacks.

But it's a matter of just in the secondary us just covering up guys, and it's why you see so many -- with the young players -- they're not afraid of their ability, and they're going to go up there and challenge a wide receiver, then these will be man up. Bump coverage, they'll play bump. They need to back off, they'll back off, but it's more just us playing on defense and playing together and playing well and playing hard.

Q. After the game, I think a lot of us might worry about a young team's psyche, but it seems like to a man the veterans are saying don't worry about these guys. Do you find that they have the right mentality to deal with the last couple weeks?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, it's going to depend on the vets. As long as they can keep that team together, we're going to be fine.

But what happens with young guys, they just don't understand yet, so they're going to continue to just go out and continue to play. Even just talking to them, they think I can make a play here or there and you look at that interception that Holton (Hill) has down the sideline and still John Burt has one taken away from him. But those young guys, they just want to play. They're just so eager to keep going, whereas it's the older guys that we can't let the psyche, let it get in their heads because then it will affect the younger players.

Q. Looking forward, are you concerned about that group?
CHARLIE STRONG: No. We can shuffle those guys around and we can get the right guys in place. We should be okay. You think about it, that was a really good defensive line that they played against, and that's what I was telling Jerrod (Heard). A lot of times you've just got to take what they give you and don't try to press it, and if you hold the ball, if a team is really good enough, their guys can get off of blocks and go get sacks. But you have to be able to break them down.

But we'll be able to move guys around and hopefully keep the quarterback protected.

Q. You've started true freshmen but also let a lot of guys come in off the bench and they seem to be playing well; Kris Boyd, Holton Hill and Davante Davis all played. Is there a thought of just letting some of these young guys start, letting them loose and seeing what they have?
CHARLIE STRONG: Yeah, we have thought about that, but sometimes you like to get into the

game and just watch the flow of the game and then once they're in, they're in, so we just let them go play it out. But, just watching how the game begins, even there Saturday -- you bring in the two freshmen with Boyd and Hill and even Davante, so we played all freshman corners. I think we talked about letting P.J. (Locke III) play a little more, and (Kevin) Vaccaro. He earned it the last game. We're just going to continue to play a lot of guys and just let them play, because what happens when they play and you play enough of them, then they play with a lot of energy, and they enjoy being out there, and they'll compete, and then you don't have to worry about just sitting there worrying, hey, can I really depend on that person. Just let them play. They'll get it done.

Q. Even with all the injuries, TCU has a pretty good offensive line. How do you cope with that, especially with some of the young guys on defense?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, the key is (Trevone) Boykin, and the thing he does is he can break you down and he'll take off. He can run with it. He has the legs to run. And then he can make the throws, and (Josh) Doctson makes unbelievable catches. You look at the catch he threw there Saturday, it bounced off of him and another receiver ended up catching it. We know the ball is going to go to Doctson. That's where the ball is going to go, and (Aaron) Green is doing a great job in the backfield, but their offensive line is very solid. They do an unbelievable job of protecting their quarterback, and that's why Boykin is able to put up the numbers that he put up, because he's going to run around and we've got to get him tackled. We're going to have to corral the ball but also we're going to have to cover because he will find the open receiver.

Q. Why has it taken a few games for (Hassan) Ridgeway to get in the starting lineup? And secondly, what was said between you and the official on the sideline because it looked like you were walking away and he was still talking to you, and then he --
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, Ridgeway, the one with Ridgeway is that he's been working hard. He actually -- you look at the California game, he played really well, and what happened the first two is just during the preseason camp he was just working back getting into shape and had a couple of nagging injuries. But then you watch him go out there and play this past week against Oklahoma State and had just a great game.

I don't remember what I said to the official. I mean, I forgot what it was.

Q. What's the status on (Kent) Perkins?
CHARLIE STRONG: Perk will be day-to-day, and I know they're going to take another look at him today, and even when I walked out there on the field, I said -- I just felt like someone had got thrown into him. He just said, I felt a helmet. I just don't know how serious it is.

Q. Having a season like this, there's a danger that players expect the worst to happen. How do you prevent that mentality?
CHARLIE STRONG: You just have to keep playing through it, and you're right, when you have tough losses like that then they wait for something bad to happen, but that's why the upperclassmen keep telling them we just have to keep playing. I tell them, if you just keep playing and play with energy, eventually it will turn our way, but don't wait for something bad to happen. We've got to create the good plays ourselves.

Q. Talk about the two tough games you have coming up.
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, if you look at it, you're right, you go three at home and now you go on the road, and it's tough because you're looking at even next week. But what I told our players and what I try to get them to understand, just make it a one-game season. Hey, let's just go get ready for TCU. It's on the road. When you go on the road, we know they have an unbelievable team, but we have to go play well. We're going to have to play in all three phases, offense, defense, and the special teams, and that's the only way -- and we're going to have to play above our heads to beat this them. It's a challenge for us, and I know we've improved over the next two weeks, but now let's go take another step and see if we can't continue to get better.

Q. Michael Dickson is in therapy, I guess? Is he on track?
CHARLIE STRONG: Got to get him out of therapy -- no, Dickson, he's an older -- he's older than those guys, so even talking with him, he'll bounce back. But it was good to get (Nick) Rose back and let him hit those two that he did, and even Tyrone (Swoopes) scoring the touchdown, it was just good to see their whole attitude. I told Tyrone even before that, it looks like we've got a good package for you, and you're going to get a chance to go in the game. I just want to see you go, and he did. But I think Dickson will be able to bounce back.

Q. We've talked about this before, but when you say the veterans have to keep the younger guys up, I mean, these are veterans who haven't won big, they haven't done it. So how much do you as coaches have to step in and keep the mentality up? And then also, too, do you feel like there are positive things under the hood here but they're just not reflected on the team's win-loss record?
CHARLIE STRONG: I've just got to lift that hood. But you're right, because the vets haven't won. You're right, so a lot of times when you haven't won, it's like, do you know how to win. But with that group, with J-Gray and with Duke (Thomas), I'd said to our team yesterday, I said we owe it to the seniors for them to go out and go in this the right way, and that's why we've got to keep playing to keep competing and keep playing hard, and I said, and it is up to us as a coaching staff to make sure that gets accomplished.

But you want to see it from the veterans because they want it bad, and like young guys, when you talk about the freshmen, they're going to go as they go. They go out there with the right attitude, and I told our coaches we've got to be upbeat and we've got to have something to us, too, and we can't go out there and walk around like it's the end of the world. It never is because we've just got to keep coaching.

Q. The freshman corners played a bunch of snaps in the game. You said coming into the season, Coach Bedford said that the safety play, you felt with (Jason) Hall and (Dylan) Haines coming back, pretty well set, safeties were a bigger issue. At this point coming into the TCU game, how set do you feel with the safety play, and also, with DeShon Elliott, do you have an update on him, when he could possibly be available, and when he does become available, in your experience will he have enough time to step in and play any meaningful snaps?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, the safety play with Haines and Hall, you look at the last game when we were able to bring in P.J. (Locke III) and Vaccaro, and I said to our guys, they deserve to play, so they'll get some rotation in and they'll get in just like we're rotating at the corner

position. But you have to make sure that in the back end we have the right checks because we don't want to give up a home run, which we did earlier in the season, and we've just got to make sure guys are covered and we don't give up those big plays.

With Elliott, he's going to be back. He's practicing now, so we've just got to work him in. You're looking at someone who hasn't done anything, but he's working to get in.

Q. What went into the decision to call the time-out on that final drive after the 2nd down play, and second, I know you obviously have had the memory lapse, but on the penalty what happened? What's the lesson that you take out of that?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, my lesson, I've just got to stay under control there. I just can't -- you know, I just got upset over a call and I probably shouldn't -- it was just enough calls to just get me, and then that one, it just threw me over the top. But I've got to stay under -- I can't lose my composure.

But at the time-out, because we were down with the headsets, we were trying to get it all communicated, and there's three guys standing there talking, and then the clock is running down, and then we had a motion, and then think we could get it off in time and then we didn't want to go backwards again. I think more than anything, that hurt us with the communication process because now we usually have Shawn (Watson) upstairs who can help Jay (Norvell), and now everybody is standing on the sideline, so everybody standing there together, we couldn't get it all done. I think that was more than officiating. I just think that just the loss of headsets hurt us more than anything on Saturday.

Q. I know you have to watch what you say about the officials, but that's what a lot of folks are talking about. Have you ever been involved in a game where there were so many questionable calls that were one-sided?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, I haven't. (Laughter.)

But I do look at it like this: We have to be a better disciplined football team. A lot of times they make the calls and they think they see what they see, but we've just got to -- we've just got to be under control ourselves, and like I said, I've got to -- even myself. But sometimes you just get pushed to that point. But I can't allow that to have a direct impact on the game.

Q. You talked about needing to play well in all three phases. Last week it was the offense. This week it was the defense that seemed to improve. How close do you think they are to being able to put it all together and play a complete game?
CHARLIE STRONG: You know, I just hope -- we're just a game away, and I just hope that each and every week, we continue to improve where we can just put it all together. You're right, you look at the defense this past week, and we had turnovers, we had two defensive touchdowns, and then offensively the second half we weren't able to go move the football.

But I look at it not to make excuses, but any time you lose your headsets and you have a young quarterback which we needed communication with him, then it's tough because now everybody is sitting there, and really you can't see the whole defensive picture because up top they can't tell you really what's going on. Be ready for this corner, he's leaning this way or this backer when

they push the front. You can't tell him those things because no one sees it.

But the communication is so -- is really critical for the offense because defensively you're going to line up, and really you don't want them to have headsets because you want to go pressure them and don't want them to see where you're coming from and what you're doing.

Q. You're four games into the season. Do you feel like the team is still lacking a clear identity of who it is on either side of the ball?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, on the defensive side, you know, being there for -- they kind of understand who they are. It's just more on defense is where you're hurting right now when you really think about it, and that's what I said earlier, that Steve Edmond and (Jordan) Hicks are two guys that you're really going to miss because you look at two guys who have been a staple for so long. There's two four-year starters. So now you go with Malik (Jefferson), and then we had to play (Anthony) Wheeler some, so now you're looking at two true freshmen at a critical -- and you think about your defense, your backers are really critical for you because they've got to get people lined up, and they had to be vocal, they had to communicate.

And that's what happens to you because up front with Ridgeway and with Tank and those guys, they're waiting for a call, they're waiting for somebody to tell them really what to go do, and then you're so young at the corner position, so you look at the backer position and you look at the corner position, and it's more they just continue to grow, and they're going to grow each and every week, and they've just got to grow into it and just got to make plays. It was good to see (Hassan) Ridgeway, a guy who's been there, go step up, and then you watch a young freshman go and get an interception for a touchdown.

But defensively it's just about them just each and every week, it's going to be where they've got to continue to just play together and play hard.

Q. And offensively?
CHARLIE STRONG: Offensively I think that now with (Jerrod) Heard back there, you kind of have an identity of what we're trying to do, and we want to be up-paced and you want to move the ball and you want to get the ball in the playmaker's hands. You throw that one to Daje (Johnson) and if he catches that, you know he's off and running, and you have enough guys with 3, with 7, with Daje making his -- Burt, you have enough guys, and then in the backfield you've got 32 and 33, so you have enough around them. So that's why you can take the pressure off the offensive line if those guys can go and make the plays and make the -- and we need to make the plays on the perimeter.

Q. TCU has traditionally been known as having such a strong defense but they gave up 52 to (Texas) Tech. They're hurt, missing a lot of guys. Is that something you think you guys can take advantage of, their defense giving up so many points?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, what they're doing right now is they're outscoring people, so what they're going to do is if we can do it, we're going to have to be able to match scores with them because they're scoring a ton of points, but they're giving up points. But I think they're missing, what, six defensive starters, and that's really hard. There's no way -- if we were to miss six defensive starters we'd really be in trouble. There's no way.

Knock on wood, I hope that don't happen.

But it's tough. It's tough in college football when you're missing that many guys. But it is, it turned into a scoring game now. But they have their weapons on offense where they can score and they can score fast, and it's why on defense we have to be smart and don't give up the big play and make them drive the ball and see if we're patient enough to make them drive the football.

Q. Jerrod (Heard) did not speak with us postgame. Just to clarify, is this an illness, injury, and was it a concern of yours heading into the game on Saturday?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, he had -- I had known Thursday, we had looked at him, I think he had a little temperature, then he came back Friday and they filled him up with fluids, and then he went out there on Saturday. (I) Wasn't that concerned because he had enough rest, and then plus we knew we were going to play Tyrone some in the short yardage package. We were just trying to take hits off of him. But I think he's bounced back, and he'll be back and ready to go.

Q. Speaking about Jerrod a little bit, it seemed like he struggled somewhat Saturday. Is that just a little bit of the reality of the a freshman starting his third game, and is the good news that a lot of the mistakes seem to be pretty correctable?
CHARLIE STRONG: Yeah, I think more than anything, he held the ball too long, and just release the football, and it's not going to be -- again, they're not going to be wide open, but we have guys that are running clean, and just go ahead and trust your ability. Sometimes when you're dealing with a young player like that, they just want -- first thing, their reaction, if it's not there, take off. But if you watch, Oklahoma State did a really good job of containing the ball, corralling the ball and forcing him in one direction, so now he can run back out the back door because they always had somebody coming back to the backside, and that's what I told him during the game. I said, listen, you're going to have to release the ball. They're not going to let you run up and down the field like you did last week.

But it's more him just seeing it. You think about him being in his third start and that's a really good defense. What they did, they did a lot of changing up because you look at him on 3rd down, and what's tough when you're standing there and you can stand up guys and you have a young quarterback and he really don't know where the pressure is coming, and that's why we need the communication we didn't have for him, and that would have helped him out tremendously.

Q. What's your friendship or relationship with Gary Patterson? He's a defensive guy like you're a defensive guy, but it looks like he's gone to the other side, loves the offense. What about the job Patterson has done? Have you ever faced him before as a coach?
CHARLIE STRONG: Me and Gary, we go way back because I know at one time we were both finalists for the Broyles Award, so we had a chance to really sit down and talk. But, he's done an unbelievable job there at TCU. You look at his success, even last season, and to go back and match it this season with the job they're doing, unbelievable coach, really good coach.

Q. There were a lot of unforced errors committed by your team, whether it was heard taking that sack on 4th down, the dropped passes, the punt or Hutchins missing a block.

How do you correct some of those things? What do you tell some of those guys that made those type of mental errors?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, you have to correct them, and you talk to them. There's no way that should ever happen because this game is mental and physical, and you have to be locked in. You have to be focused. A lot of times when a guy walks out there, you have a job to do, just do your job. You don't know what play in the game is going to determine the game, so that's why you have to play every play, and they have to understand that.

Q. An Xs and Os question: It seems like your corners when they're turned in, they give a lot of cushion and make slants very easy for the other team to complete, but they're funneling things back to the middle of the field. What are your thoughts on how you approach these passing teams and what do you want the secondary to do?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, it depends on who the corner is. Guys got to trust their ability because if you watch, a lot of times it depends on the alignment. The alignment of a wide receiver will tell you a lot of times what the route is. If you ever watch, if they're out wide, listen, only thing they can do is come back inside, and if they're tight they're going to go across the field and they're going to run an out-cut.

But they've got to trust their ability, and when you're dealing with a lot of young corners, they just don't have that confidence yet. They're lined up and you want to say, hey, go press them, and then they'll get beat over the top.

But with those young guns, they don't -- nothing fazes them. It's like they're going to jump up there and they're going to press and they're going to go inside and do what you ask them to do. But guys just have to trust who they are and trust their ability. It is, this is a game where alignments and -- what I always tell them is formation and alignments tell you everything, but you have to study it and you have to realize what's coming. Once you understand what the formation is, they call it a -- they brought a -- it was a 3rd down, big 3rd down play, and they bring a crosser all the way back across the field, and we knew what the route was. We call that a dry route. We understand what the route was but we didn't defend it. We know the route, so let's defend it. But that happens.

The guy ended up running past the backer and outrunning him back to our sideline. But it is, and it's all about adjustments, but it's where we -- we just have to continue to coach them and get them in the right place.

Q. The season tickets go up an average of 21.5 percent; you don't have any say over that. Fans think you're headed towards 1-5, doom and gloom, and some questions about whether you were supported by your athletic director. You don't have a communications director who was with you. What's a fair expectation for the fans from this team and where the program is right now in light of all the stuff that's been going on around here?
CHARLIE STRONG: You know, I say this, and this is the University of Texas and it is the elite of the elitest. Our fans are unbelievable. We have the best fans in the country, and their job is to just come out and support our team. It's going to get headed in the right direction. I don't ever want to make an excuse. We know this, we've got to get better. We have to play better. We've got to give them something to watch where it's exciting for them.

But you know, if you ever watch it, it's a cycle that we're going through right now, but it's a cycle that can turn quickly, and it can turn in our favor, which that's going to happen. But we need their support and we need them to come out and support this team.

There's not a better feeling for a player to know that he has all the support around him, and when he knows that everybody is behind him -- but that happens. We go out there last week against Cal, and we get a standing ovation after the game, and then even this week against Oklahoma State, you know, the student section was still standing there cheering when we ran off the field.

We just know this: We've got to do a better job of coaching. Our players got to do a better job of playing. But we need our fans and we need their support, and we need everybody from the lettermen to the alums to whomever, subway fans if you want to call them that. But we need everyone behind us, because you know what, when it flips, and it's going to flip, then everybody is going to want to jump on board. So, might as well get on board right now, because it's going to flip.

Q. Could you just kind of assess 2016 recruiting and where you guys are with that class in terms of do you feel like you're in a good spot with the priority targets on your board? Do you feel like you and the staff have been proactive enough? And what do you sell to those guys that you want to get in here?
CHARLIE STRONG: It's going to be just like what happened last year where it's going to go down to the end. We recruit, and we recruit every day. That's not the issue. The issue is that we've just got to continue to play better because it's what they look at because they want to be a part of a team that's winning but also they want to be part of a team where they know there's light at the end of the tunnel.

But there's a lot of guys still sitting there, so it's not like you guys -- we're so used to rushing into it. Those guys, it's not like you can press them for a decision because they're not going to give you one because they're going to say, I want to go here, Coach. So we're pressing for decisions but you're just not getting them right now. No one is getting those decisions because you still see them sitting there.

Q. You're an 18-and-a-half-point underdog to TCU. Does that suggest a lack of respect and do you use that to motivate your team?
CHARLIE STRONG: I didn't know it was that bad, huh? We've just got to go out there and go to work.