University of Texas Football
Media Conference
Monday, September 7, 2015

Charlie Strong
Head Coach

CHARLIE STRONG: The outcome on Saturday is not what we expected, and is not acceptable, and this week we're going to take our time. We started on it yesterday and just evaluate everything with this program and just start all over again.

As coaches we know we have to coach better, and as players we know we have to play a lot better. It's something you want to restart the season and push that button, and we went back to work last night, had the players out on Sunday, and what we do on Sundays is we go back out and just do a small focus on Rice, but we go back to the game on Saturday and it's all about corrections and taking our time with plays that didn't work and how we can get better and how we can improve.

The thing is you know this is a program that's built on a lot of tradition and pride and there's no quit in this football team. There won't ever be any quit in this program. It's all about us getting ready for Rice, knowing that Rice is an outstanding program.

You look at what Coach has done, three bowl games there, first time in school history that has happened.

But we have many issues we have to get corrected starting on the offensive side of the football. It's all about just moving the football. It's about getting 1st downs and 1st downs will lead to scores.

On defense we know we cannot give up the big play on defense, and that was what hurt us. You get the game back to 17-3, you have the ball pinned down on the 10-yard line, then we let them out and they end up throwing a big pass play on us. I have to do a better job as a head football coach knowing I need to be just totally involved.

I am involved in the offense, and when it comes down to 3rd down, I tell them whether we run or pass, and even with a two-minute situation, but on defense I do call some of the plays on defense; not many, I let Vance handle that; and even involved with the kicking game.

But we just have to make sure that evaluate it as a coaching staff on the offensive side, defensive side, and we've got to get better because that's not who we are. The other night is not who we are. That's not what we're about, and I know this: We are a better football team than what we showed the other night.

Q. Two things: Are you sticking with Tyrone this week over Jerrod, and can you personally afford to have a second season lost to a bad offense?
CHARLIE STRONG: The first question, with Tyrone and Jerrod, we're going to go through this week and then we're going to make that decision later on at the end of the week. We ended up wanting to play both of them the first half, which we did, and then the second half when we got it back to 17-3 and then it goes to 24-3, we just felt like Tyrone would do a better job of trying to get us back in the game. We threw the football but just didn't protect it.

We can't go through another season with a bad offense. No, that cannot happen. We have some talented players there. You look at J-Gray, he touched the ball eight times the other night. He's a back that needs the ball. The ball needs to be fed to him anywhere from 15 to 20 to 25 times. But then you have Foreman sitting there, you have Warren.

Our offense has to run through our running backs and we have to run the football. You look at us outside on the perimeter, you have Warren; Burt is a guy who can stretch the field; you have Armanti who can stretch the field; and then you have Daje when you want to run, it starts with him and Marcus. So we have some athletes there on offense there. We've just got to do a better job of spreading the ball around and making sure that the right guys get the touches. We've got to get the ball in their hands.

Q. I've got to ask you about Shawn Watson. His offense hasn't really been able to get it done against TCU or Arkansas and now here at Notre Dame, didn't have a quarterback throw for a touchdown in the spring game. I've got to know what your confidence level is with Shawn Watson at this point. Do you feel like he's meeting your expectations right now?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, that's what I said, we have to evaluate it, and it has to come from that whole offensive staff. I know Shawn is the coordinator, but there's other guys involved, even myself involved, and

we've just got to evaluate this week and just see exactly where we are.

We have to change. We have to get better on offense. You're right, you go back, and I know last year is last year, but even to come out of this game with three points, with the players that we have, we should be more productive.

Q. The fans can do it, the media can do it, everybody can overreact. Is it big things? Is it little things? How do you prevent overreaction and just fix the problems?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, they have a reason. Everyone has a reason to overreact because you expect more. This is an unbelievable program, and I expect more. I can see the overreaction because I go back and we got off that bus in South Bend, and you should have -- our fan support and our crowd was unbelievable. It was like a home game. So when we walked in the locker room, I said to our players, I said, if we can't go play for what we have here tonight, we'll never get up to go play all season long. I said, when our fans traveled as far as they've traveled to watch this football team, to watch this squad, and then we go out and play the way we did.

But everybody wants more, which they should, because we have enough, and we've just got to be -- we have to do better.

Q. You say you need to run the football more. Why did J-Gray only get eight touches in the game?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, we only had 52 snaps. I think somewhere in the first half, I'm not exactly for sure, but I know we had for the whole game eight three-and-outs, and you have to get 1st downs, so when you get 1st downs you can get more touches because J-Gray had eight, I want to say Deonte had three and then Warren had three. You only had 14 touches out of 29, and we only rushed the ball for 29 times, and I think eight of those were with Tyrone because he was trying to scramble around.

But we've got to get the ball in his hands. It's very obvious because he's someone that when the ball is in his hands he's electrifying, and he can make people miss and he can get positive yards for us.

Q. You said you see yourself getting move involved in the offense. How does that look?
CHARLIE STRONG: It's not so much I need to get more involved. I sit in on the meetings, but it's that -- I get involved with 3rd down, when it's 3rd and short or whatever. I say, hey, listen, I want to run here or pass here. In the two-minute, I say let's go for it right before the half when it's two minutes to go, two-oh-something, and I said, listen, get the ball down the field; we've got to get a score and do what we have to do, throw, run, whatever we need to do; let's get the ball down the field.

Q. On that note, you said that you had be making some defensive calls and you're not going to do that anymore, you're going to let Vance handle it all now; is that correct?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, I didn't say that. I said I do make some of the calls but not many.

Q. You're still going to be involved in doing that part, the defensive calls?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, you know what, it's got to be offense. Just the whole -- I'm the head coach, so I can make any call I want with the offense and defense and special teams, so I'm going to do those things, and if I don't like a call, I'm going to say, no, no, let's think about that before we do it, because a lot of times those guys already have an idea of what they'd like to call, but I can also say, whoa, listen, slow down, let's think about this, look at where we are.

But sometimes it's the whole thinking process where it's one play has got to set up the next play.

Sometimes if you run a ball, just say if you run a zone play to the right, quarterback comes out the back door, hey, where is that defensive end. We have to know all those things and we have to be totally involved in the game.

Q. The players were so sure that they made progress all off-season. I'm curious, what was their attitude like yesterday and how careful do you have to be with them just to make sure that they stay engaged and don't get down so early in the year?
CHARLIE STRONG: They won't get down because you look at it, it's the first game, and what you have here is just so many young players that a lot of them, they just came out there last night, and sometimes you really have to tone them down to make sure that they understand, hey, guys, this isn't acceptable here because sometimes they want to come back out and kid around, like hey, this game, kind of it's still wearing on me, so I want it to kind of wear on the players. But the players won't ever back away or back down.

Q. How critical are the next few weeks to your tenure here, your part in this program as you guys look forward?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, it is very critical. Our goal is to win the Conference Championship. That's what our goal is. We know this, we're coming in with Rice and then it's Cal after that. But we have to go play well and

we have to be productive. We need to go play well.

When you talk about, we talked about just the alarm of the fan base, everyone involved with this program. There's millions and millions of people involved with this program, and we've got to give them hope, and they need to see progress, and after the other night, I feel -- you look at that game, and you're like, wow. We said we were going to be up tempo. There was no up tempo. We said we were going to do this. That didn't happen.

But there's got to be hope and there's got to be progress. Yeah, you have all these young players, but still, there's still got to be something in it for us where we're looking to say, hey, maybe they are moving forward, maybe we do see a change, maybe we are getting better, and we didn't see those things.

Q. You said (inaudible) in a lot of departments. What did you see in the effort department that's going to determine how things go?
CHARLIE STRONG: I looked out there, and I thought they played hard, it was just the mental mistakes that we made. You look at us, just offensive line-wise, even those guys, they competed. We turned some guys loose, but still, we competed. And even on the defensive side, they played hard, but you can't give up the big plays.

So the effort was there, and I told Vance after watching the tape when we got back, I said, I can't question just our effort and our heart we played with, but we've just got to play smart, and we didn't play smart. We have to execute, and we didn't execute. If you get those things done and then you put it all together, then it'll happen for you.

I didn't think -- at first I thought the stage was going to be too big, and I didn't think it was too big. I thought they jumped out there, even in the very beginning, and I told them, I said, if we win the toss we're going to defer and we deferred, but if we could have just moved the ball and got a 1st down and then continued to get a 1st down, who knows what would have happened.

Q. I want to go back. Are you saying the quarterback position is open this week for maybe Jerrod to take that spot, and if that's the case, what do you think he can show you that we haven't seen?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, even though it was open earlier, he competed, and it wasn't like it was a big separation between those two. So now when you go into it, like we're in situations where we go Tuesday and Wednesday where we actually compete at practice, where he's going to be placed in some situations where we have to compete and go move the football.

But still, it just comes down to guys making just -- the decision-making process for the quarterback, but we have to place them in that decision where they are able to make those decisions and give them a chance.

I went into the game and I said that there's five things we have to do: We have to play great defense. We didn't get that done. Number two, we have to run the football. We didn't run the football. We have to control the clock. We didn't control the clock. I said, we have to protect our quarterback, and we have to win on special teams. The special teams, early we had to settle the punter down, but I felt like in our special teams, we were better, covered their kicks and everything better. But those things, four or five of those we didn't get done.

Q. It was believed that your defensive line was probably going to be the strength of this team. Are you concerned that they were getting blocked all night it looked like, and secondly, Ridgeway and Tank Jackson, how healthy are they? Are they really struggling through injuries right now?
CHARLIE STRONG: Not that I want to take anything away, but their offensive line was really good. That's probably going to be the best offensive line they're going to face all year. 78 is going to be a top-10 pick, top-5 pick, so they had a lot to handle there, and we knew that going into the game, and what they had done is they took one of their other players from last season and moved him to the center position, which posed a problem.

And it wasn't so much they were getting knocked out, but if you look at an offensive lineman, only thing he needs to do is cover up D-lineman, and so once he covered him up, if a guy can get past the point of attack at the line of scrimmage, then a back is going to be able to run the ball.

But when you talk about the health, I think that Tank is still getting there because with the foot injury, he's still moving, but not at the speed he needs to move at, but I think as the season goes, he's going to get stronger.

And then Ridgeway, with him it's more just getting in shape.

Q. You said earlier, to clarify, you said you're reevaluating what's going on on offense. Just for clarity, is that going to include possibly reassigning play-calling duties to another coach on staff?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, not so much of that. What we're talking about right now, and what we need to look

at is just offensively just exactly what we're doing. We talked about running the football. What is our game plan, how are we going to go run the football, and are these the runs. With our passing game, are these the passing game? How are we going to protect the quarterback? Who is going to get the football, get the ball in the playmaker's hands? Because when you spread people out, it's all about playmakers and it's about getting the ball in their hands, and as soon as you can make a guy miss in the perimeter, you got the ball outside with Daje and you get him one-on-one, sometimes he's going to win. Those guys are good tacklers; they got him down on the ground. A couple of times we thought he was going to skirt away from them, and then he'd throw the long ball out there to Burt and probably needed to pressure on them and throw the ball -- throw more long balls. I think we threw one to Burt he caught, the one down the sideline to Armanti which we overthrew, and then we had a couple more that we were going to throw but just we had a stutter-and-go called on one and the guy was actually beat, he just couldn't get it off.

Q. Coming home, and everybody hears and reads the noise, your kids see it all. How do you keep them from playing tight after what happened Saturday?
CHARLIE STRONG: They've got to go back out and we have to do a better job as a coaching staff of getting them prepared and ready to go play. What's key is once we get them back say, hey, guys, just relax and just enjoy every game.

Every game here is a big game. That's just the way it is. Each and every week you have to get up and get ready to go play the next one. As poor as we played at Notre Dame, let's put that one behind us and it's hard to put it behind you because we didn't play well but let's move on and let's go get ready for the next one.

Q. After looking at film can you tell us what you thought of Swoopes' play, and when you met with the staff yesterday, was it an all-staff meeting, was it individuals, and what was stressed from you?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, the second one, whenever I lose a game there's not much -- I don't say much to my staff because I don't want them to know how I feel right then. I may say some things that I'll probably regret later.

But there wasn't much to say. They know how I felt. They know how I felt after that game, and they know how I felt during the game. There wasn't much I had to say to them.

When you look at Swoopes, I thought he battled. When he tried to scramble he was diving. The protection was an issue. When they turned him loose, a few times he took off with the ball.

But with all of us, with all those guys, we have to play better. We do. And that's what's key. He can get better.

Q. Just curious, now that we see the offense, how much of it is actually different from last season in terms of team, and is it more a case of tempo, or are there differences that maybe we aren't picking up on?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, I was hoping I'd see a big difference myself. But when you talk about up tempo, it's about just moving the football and just -- but if you look at it, I think that maybe we may have had two three-and-outs where we was out there for 55 seconds, so you had the defense back out there on the field. But you had to be productive. You have to get 1st downs, and we didn't get 1st downs. What 1st downs are going to do, they're going to allow you to move the football, then those 1st downs, then the next time it's a big chunk play, then it's a touchdown. We all want to see touchdowns, and that's what we're not producing because you look at some offenses, they score so many points, and we have the playmakers, now let's go score.

Q. Last year you squeezed every ounce you could out of your offensive line. How do you feel about this group and how do you approach building up their confidence again?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, I look at our offensive line and I know we have two freshmen out there in Vahe and Connor, but you've still got Perk's in there, you've got Sed, you've got Doyle and then you've got Hutch who you can move in the mix, which we did, so you're playing about six to eight guys, and they went against -- I look at Day who's sitting there at Notre Dame and he's a really good player, and you know the outside rusher is a good player. We knew we were going to have our hands filled up with trying to just block those guys.

But the key thing is where we can help our offensive line is with protection, turning the protection and not getting them one-on-one in different situations because a lot of times, like I said before this game, if I'm playing against a young offensive line, I'm going to blitz every time, and I'm going to make them block us because I know at one point they're going to turn somebody loose because if you show them enough looks, they can't block them all, but if you turn to protection, then you've got to run through it, and that's what they did to us a lot. What they did was they max protected probably 60 percent of that game where they kept everybody in, they threw outside so they was going to try to win

outside by max protecting, and that's where we've got to help our guys.

Q. With that being said and with the offensive line struggling to protect like they were on Saturday, is there any merit to the idea that a running quarterback, a mobile quarterback like Jerrod could be a better fit?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, what a running quarterback does to you is he settles you down, so now you really can't just come with all the pressure because what you get afraid of, if he breaks the contain, it's over with and he can get down the field on you. That's kind of what happened with us with Zaire on Saturday. We're sitting there, we didn't rush a lot because they converted some big 3rd down plays on us because you go rush him and then he breaks the contain from you, then he's running. But you want -- a mobile quarterback who can cause you problems.

Q. Do you think that you have the experience on the offensive line to stay committed to that run game that you guys want to stay with this year?
CHARLIE STRONG: Oh, we have that. When you talk about running the football, it's a matter of you're just covering up people and knocking people off the ball, and if you look at it, and the touches that he had, J-Gray, I mean, he had big runs. But you've got to mix up the run and pass and you have to be balanced with it. It's always when you talk about the spread where you have people running sideways and then all of a sudden you attack them downhill. You run the speed sweep, boom, then all of a sudden here comes the quarterback right behind you. Then next run you hand it to the running back.

But you can mix up the running game. If you look at a lot of offensive lines, people that run the spread, their offensive line is not great. It's not like you're putting your hand in the ground and you're just coming off and it's power football where they're trying to knock you back. No, it's a lot of window dressing going on, so you've just got to be able to get the ball in the right guy's hand with the playmakers, where all of a sudden you go speed sweep, you've got the defense running sideways. Then all of a sudden you drop back, throw the ball, then they have to drop back down. Then all of a sudden you come downhill, now they're going to be ready to come downhill, then next time you mix it up. It's all about the play calling and it's all about just mixing it up.

Q. We've seen how passionate Shawn is about Tyrone when he's talked to us for a year plus now. My question is are you concerned that Shawn's thoughts about Tyrone are maybe too clouded because he wants him to win so bad? Is he not really seeing what is really there?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, he can be clouded, but the thing about it, we have to win, and the best person has got to line up at that position to win the football game, too. That's why we're playing two quarterbacks. You get them out there, but at the end of the day when the decision is going to be made, the best one is going to line up.

Q. It seemed like at times during the Notre Dame game, Notre Dame was targeting certain quadrants of the defense. Have you given any thought to personnel to maybe get more athletes on the field so you might be more protected against athletes kind of roaming free?
CHARLIE STRONG: It wasn't so much where they was targeted. We know this, the thing about it, with Notre Dame was certain sets, we were going to get certain plays. So when they threw a deep one down the sideline, we were in cover-two, we knew where the ball was going. Hey, wherever 7 is, find 7. Our guys knew that, just find No. 7. Certain places that he lined up, he's going to get the ball, and if he's outside, the ball is coming deep. If he's inside, they're going to run the jet sweep to him or they're going to throw the jailbreak. So we knew exactly where he was.

It's all about the guys just locking in and being focused and just executing. Vance is yelling from the sideline, hey, here he is, right here he is, he's on our sideline, and get a jam on him, Duke, and then, boom, he releases and one player thought he saw the tight end vertical, which he wasn't vertical, then the ball was thrown to the outside.

The one play, the first touchdown they scored where he comes across the middle, we had what we call red 2 called, and the only thing the backer has to do is drop to the middle of the field in red 2, but he saw a guy come underneath, so he took the bait, and the ball was thrown up over him.

But like I said, they're placed in those situations. It's just execution.

Q. Any update on Marcus Johnson's ankle, and also, did an injury contribute to Jerrod not going back into the game in the second half?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, Jerrod got hit there early, and the second half, like I say, when it got to 24 we were playing to playing catch-up.

But Marcus has an ankle injury. It's going to be day by day, so we'll see where we are later on in this week with him.

Q. Yesterday when you met, did you meet with the

staff, was anything said to Shawn about I want this, I want J-Gray to get 15 to 20 carries? Any specifics that you said you want to see from the offense going forward?
CHARLIE STRONG: No, yesterday I didn't say much. I will meet with our staff today. Like I said, it's hard for me after a game to meet with our guys on a Sunday just because the way I feel, because there will be some things said that I'd probably regret later and I don't want it to come out the wrong way, so I kind of just -- because it bothers me. It bothers me when we play the way we do. It bothers me when we're not productive, and it bothers me when we're not accountable as coaches, so it's hard for me to meet with guys. It's hard for me to talk. I don't talk to my own family, so I don't say nothing. I kind of just --

Q. What did you say to them?
CHARLIE STRONG: Oh, I got a lot to say, but I'm not going to say it now, but I have a lot to say.

But I don't talk -- like I said, after a game I don't talk to anyone. I just go and sit down and they know not to talk to me, don't say nothing to me.

Q. What would you say to recruits out there who were expecting something different, and how difficult is it to get turned around for recruiting purposes?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, it's all about recruiting, and they have to see improvement. They have to see change, too, and it's good that we've got some -- we've got more games to go play so they're going to have that opportunity. But they are -- and because I just talked to one recruit before we even played the game. He says, oh, Coach, I can't wait to see that up-tempo offense and see what happens. My man didn't see what he thought he was going to see, I guess, huh? Shawn, he didn't see that, huh?

Q. How frustrating is it that a week into the season you're having to start all over and start from scratch?
CHARLIE STRONG: Things can always get fixed. It's about us just going back to work and just rolling up your sleeves and digging in. It can get fixed. We have the players to get it fixed. If you didn't have the players, you'd say, yeah, you have issues, but we can get it fixed.

When we talk about the restart it's that you just start -- that we'd just have more productivity. We would go in, and as good as Notre Dame was, I still look at that game and say that we didn't go compete at the level that we should have competed at. We did not, and that says -- that's on me as a head football coach. That's my fault, and I told our assistant coaches that we're going to restart this thing, so you guys are going to be productive, you're going to be accountable. We talk to the players all the time about being accountable. As coaches we have to be accountable and we have to get it done.

Q. Are jobs on the line here as far as your coaching staff goes?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, some of these guys I've been with a long time, so they know how I am and they know how I feel and I'm not afraid to express how I feel, and they've heard it and they've heard it from day one. So it's an evaluation process.

Q. Three really tough losses the last three times out. Is this uncharted water for you?
CHARLIE STRONG: It's very uncharted, because you're right, you think about the last three showings that we've had, it has been embarrassing. I've told our staff, it has been embarrassing the last three games that we've played, and you have to continue to build confidence. And as a head football coach, they're still going to feed off of you, so it's how I approach it and how I go about it Monday. Like yesterday I said I wasn't very good, but when we went out to practice with the players, I kind of riled them, I kind of lightened up because I know I've got to have them. And the thing is you don't want to be down because then all of a sudden they're going to be down, and a lot of them don't really understand -- they understand but they really don't understand like, hey, it's about going back to work, guys, and for a player, they can lose a game and it's -- a couple hours after the game, they're fine. They're going on about their business. It's something as a coach it just lingers on you.

But we still have to continue to build our confidence, and that's why it's good you're back home, you're going to play a really good team, and this team can move the football on us. But that's why we kind of make sure that we approach it the right way, and as a coaching staff we go get our guys ready to play. We have to get them ready.

Q. Some of the freshmen, especially (inaudible) at the start of the game. How would you describe how they competed on that stage in the first game?
CHARLIE STRONG: Well, you look at the two offensive linemen, and it's so hard because everyone looks at the number of sacks, but they did go out and compete, and the thing about Vahe, he's big, he's sinking down inside, he's a guy that if he locks onto you, he can move you. And then Connor on the edge, he was battling a really good player all day long, held his ground. And you look on offense -- at defense, Malik did an unbelievable job. I'd say the two guys on defense played really well that night was Malik and

Duke Thomas, and Malik had a bunch of plays, and then you look at John Burt, the catch that he made on the outside, and who's my other true freshman starter -- Boyd played on kicking game. Yeah, Boyd was unbelievable in the kicking game, and the thing about him is on the kickoff I have these two guys are going to be really great players here. I have Boyd and I have Hager, and their only job they have is get to the ball. Don't worry about lanes, don't worry about anything else. I just want to see you get to the ball on the kickoff, and you saw Boyd and Hager get down there, and Vaccaro comes from the back side. But I think when you end up playing a lot, you play Boyd, Holton Hill played a little, Davante Davis played a little, P.J. played some, but you have a very talented freshman group, so they'll just continue to get better, and a lot of them are going to end up playing a lot of football.