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An Interview With:

TEXAS COACH CHARLIE STRONG

COACH STRONG: Really excited about the upcoming season just days away. We're going to report on August the 6th and then get ready to go on August the 7th.

The good thing about it, you go through winter conditioning and then you go through the summer, and most of our guys are in place, even with our freshmen. Just really excited about our team because one of our goals is to build a team. The way you build a team, you just have to get everyone on board.

So much was made last season about the suspensions. I want you to understand this. My goal is never, ever to kick a young man out of the program. I want them to have every opportunity to be successful, but decisions are made, and sometimes guys feel like they want to do things their way. When that happens, then we have to make a decision on our end.

But if you look at this team now, you're always looking for leadership, you're looking for discipline. We have to have a winning season.

Last year 6-7 is not good enough. It will never be good enough at the University of Texas. We know we lost a lot of players on defense, returned a lot on offense, but we have to improve as a coaching staff. We have to do a better job of coaching. But we've also got to get our players to go play and go compete and go compete week in and week out.

The schedule is very challenging. It's very demanding. We open up in South Bend, and you look at two programs so rich in tradition. We go there. You come home against Rice. You come home against Cal Berkeley. Then we have Oklahoma State coming in with our first conference game. Then we have to go on the road to TCU. Then we have the Red River Shootout.

But the good thing about it, why would you want it any other way? That's why, if you're at a place at University of Texas, and that's why players have to understand, it's all about competing. That's why you're here. You're here to go compete for championships.

Q. When preseason camp starts, what do you want to see out of Tyrone and Jerrod?

COACH STRONG: I always say this. A lot is made about the quarterback position, and it should be. When it plays well, it gets a lot of praise. When it plays bad, it gets a lot of criticism.

I was just saying earlier, and I think about this, not to compare -- no way am I trying to compare here. But every quarterback I've ever been around, there's been really good players around them. I could just go back University of Florida, and I think about Tim Tebow, you had Percy Harvin lined up, Aaron Hernandez lined up, you had Riley Cooper outside. You had Rainey behind, you had two first-rounders on the offensive line. Everybody's got to do their part. It's all about everyone doing their part.

You talk about what you see out of Swoopes and what you see out of Heard, both those guys are very competitive, but everyone else around them needs to play well also. We need to find playmakers at wide receiver. We need the running backs. You got J. Gray here. We need him to have a big year. We need the offensive line to protect the quarterback. Then you will have a chance.

But it's all about them managing the offense, putting us in position where we can move the football, but not turning the ball over and having dumb plays or dumb mistakes.

Q. From what you've seen over the summer and what Coach Moorhead has seen working with the guys, do you believe you have more guys or have found more guys who are just as mad about the end of last season as you were?

COACH STRONG: Well, they all want to change it because now that -- and I was talking to the senior group, and during their whole career, they have never had a double-digit winning season. So it's more about them. They want to show that what it's all about and what the university is all about and just how they want to go out and compete.

But it's happening. And I talk to Coach Moorer all the time. I always ask him what's the pulse of the team, how they're doing, how they're acting. And he said now you're beginning to see more guys step up.

But you know what, when you're at a place like here, it should be like that. We shouldn't even have to have this conversation. It should get where each and every year we talk about competing.

Q. What are you looking for in terms of body language from your guys as you look at them in the spring and summer and get into fall? Are you looking for nonverbal cues that they've gotten over the end of last year?

COACH STRONG: Well, anytime you talk about body language, you want guys that are confident and guys that believe in their ability and believe in who they are. Sometimes it doesn't hurt to have a little -- a few words that come out of their mouth to make them feel good.

But when you talk about the body language, they understand, and they look at last season, and they know themselves, they understand just how important it is and how important football is and what they have to get accomplished and everything they have to overcome.

When you talk about body language, it has a lot to do with confidence and how you carry yourself.

Q. My question is last year you dismissed the nine players during your off-season prior to your first season, and you talked about this earlier. You brought up that new set of rules. Has this -- how has this culture changed in the locker room? And has it had the effect that you want it to have?

COACH STRONG: Well, it wasn't so much. Let me say this. It wasn't so much new rules. Coach Brown did an unbelievable job. Anytime there's a coaching change, some guys just felt like they want to do things their way.

So like I said, so much has been made about that. When you look at what happened and when, as a coaching staff, we sat down, even with our players, it's not where you got to sit there and say, hey, listen, you're out. You're out. You're out. You start pointing at guys and telling them they're out of the program, that never, ever happened. They were given plenty of opportunities to do what was asked of them.

So the culture -- it wasn't so much you had to have a change of culture because, when you look at this, you say nine guys. We have 85 guys on scholarship. So if the other 76 can do everything we ask of them, then why can't those nine do it?

Q. Coach, you talked about the wide receiver position. You lose John Harris, a guy who really stepped up. Who do you see in that role as wide receiver to step up like he did last season? How has Coach Norvell kind of changed the mentality of the wide receivers?

COACH STRONG: You look at Daje, he's a senior now, Marcus Johnson, those guys need to step up and become playmakers. I was just teasing Daje the other day, and I said, You haven't made a play since Oklahoma when you returned that punt for a touchdown. There's got to be a point where he's got to step up and start at that position. Because you're always looking for playmakers, and then that takes a lot of pressure off the quarterback because, if you can throw the ball out there and make a guy miss in open field and you can take it the distance, then you always give yourself confidence and also give the offense confidence.

You look at Peter, Warrick, look at Leonard and Lorenzo Joe, but we have to develop playmakers at that position. Jay's done an unbelievable job. He's an unbelievable coach. He came in, and players have really taken a liking to him. They do everything that is asked of them from him. And the thing about Jay is he's very detailed, very disciplinarian, but he's a guy that's making sure that that position improves.

Q. Everett Golson said that he would have considered transferring to Texas. Notre Dame blocked that transfer. Should, in your opinion, schools have the power to do that to a graduating senior?

COACH STRONG: Anytime you play

someone and you just feel like you're going to go compete against that team next year and he was the starting quarterback, so much of whatever they have within their program as far as what's their defense, their calls, what's their offensive calls, and they may feel like that's what he knows.

But when a young man gets at a point -- it's just so hard to say, hey, where are you going to go play? Because they're always searching. They want to go to a team where they feel like it's lesser talent, where they can get on the field the fastest.

Q. What's the current status of the office tigers?

COACH STRONG: You want one? I'll give you one. I've got a pet tiger, if you want.

What happened was someone had brought it by the office. Santos brought them and put them down in front of me and says, Coach, let me take a picture, because he's king of the tweet. As all of you know, you can go on his, and you'll find out anything.

So he brought them in and said "Coach's Day at the Office," and he tells me he tweeted it out. That's why it ended up like that. But, no, those tigers are where they need to be right now.

Q. Charlie, how big is the barometer for the entire season, the opening game at Notre Dame?

COACH STRONG: You like to always say this. When you have an opponent like Notre Dame and it's right there at the beginning of the season and through the winter conditioning, through the off-season, it's something that you've been working to. So now it's something that's sitting there where they understand just the whole -- just the magnitude of that game, and they return a lot of starters. It's going to be an unbelievable game for us. Very challenging game.

But we need to go out and we need to go play well, and they understand what's really good is Notre Dame. So not a lot has to be said. Now it's about us now just building our team.

Q. What would Jerrod Heard have to do to impress you in order to take that spot from Tyrone Swoopes?

COACH STRONG: Well, they both are going to get that shot. It's not so much as what he's got to do. It's still a learning process for him, and Jerrod is coming along good, and both of them are there this summer. Haven't had a chance to watch them really look out because we can't.

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When we get into fall camp, we'll see just where he is and how much more he needs to learn.

Q. How tough was it your first year coming in as a defensive coach by trade and having to deal with the high-powered offenses like Baylor? And is there a temptation this year to take more chances offensively?

COACH STRONG: What happens is it depends on your personnel. So when you talk about the Bayers and the TCUs, just defensively you had to get a line. You have to get lined up. So when you talk about chances, if you feel like you can't score on offense, you can't take too many chances because now you've got to sit back and just hope you can keep them from scoring.

But just learning those offenses and just making sure that on defense we just don't -- it doesn't become a mismatch game, because a lot of times that's what it is. They're looking for mismatches. So instead we can throw the ball to the outside, make a guy miss, get it one-on-one in open field and see if you can get him on the ground.

But just defensively, I thought Vance did a really good job of just going in and just game planning. When you talk about chances, if you can't score, then it's really tough on you.

Q. The Southeastern Conference passed a rule back in May where they said they'd bar the signing of athletes who had been disciplined for serious misconduct at other places. I'm curious your thoughts on that, and would you favor the Big 12 doing something like that as well?

COACH STRONG: I would favor it because I always look at it like this. If you are a student-athlete and you have a chance to go to University of Texas, go to Oklahoma, Texas A&M, Baylor, TCU, wherever you go, and then for some reason you did something that they had to dismiss you from that program, I don't think that you should be given another opportunity to go to another major school and just start all over like your slate is clean. I just don't think that should happen for you.

You look at it, you were at an unbelievable place, and so now you did something yourself to get yourself dismissed out. So why do you think that you can go somewhere else and just start all over like it's a clean slate for you?

I'm all into giving guys second chances,

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but I want to give guys on my team second chances, not someone else from another program.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about just the freshmen play that you have. You've got some freshmen with some definite talent, in particular, Malik Jefferson. Can you talk about those guys on the defensive end.

COACH STRONG: Well, you look at our freshmen, and the good thing about Malik, he was able to come in in the spring and did a really good job. I think he came in at like 217. He's up at like 240 now. Connor Williams is another that came in as an offensive lineman, was a tight end in high school, went to offensive line, and has done an unbelievable job.

With the rest of them, they're coming in right now, and there's some freshmen on campus. But the good thing about it is the upperclassmen have done a great job of just walking them in and teaching them everything. You look at those from the Holton Hills, those young DBs, from Davis to Kris Boyd, there's a lot of learning for them. It's all about the learning process.

When you look at the freshmen, they're all excited week one, and then all of a sudden it all hits them with the classes and the working out, and they kind of calm down. So now it will be interesting, when we get them to August, how they're going to react and how they're going to go out.

Q. A couple of years ago, you had three good running backs and one left, last year two with Michael and Jonathan. Now it's Jonathan. Might this make things easier, depending on -- and I'm sure you've got backups too. But for Jonathan and maybe for the running game, for him to know he's the main guy?

COACH STRONG: What happened last year, you had Jonathan and you had Malcolm. The thing about J. Gray, he was coming back from that Achilles, so you just didn't know how healthy he was. I think we had to get like within the season for him really to get back on track.

Now with him being the guy, you expect big things for him. And I told him that, I said now with you being that guy. We have backups, but we'd like to see J. Gray go out and just have a big year.

Q. Charlie, if you get quality quarterback play, is this team the upside? Is it

a team that you would see going 9-3? Or is this a team that you would see winning the league? If you get that good, quality quarterback play.

COACH STRONG: I don't know what the number would be or what would happen, but not only with the quarterback, it's got to come from all positions. You look at us on defense, we lost six key starters there. So we're going to have to play really well on defense. That's where it all starts at.

With the quarterback position, it is a very critical position because you want to see that position play so well. And Swoopes -- and I'll tell you this right now. He wants to play well because of so much has been said about him, and he wants to prove to everyone that he can play that position. I hope he does do that. I'd be more than happy if he did.

But it's all about us just performing well as a team in all phases.

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