

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday, July 19, 2016

Charlie Strong

Texas

THE MODERATOR: Joining us on the dais is Head Coach of Texas, Charlie Strong. Welcome, Coach. Thoughts on the opening season?

CHARLIE STRONG: Really excited because we know we're only a few weeks away and things get started and you're in a pre-season camp. I look at last season and I know this: We've gotta be better than what we were the last two years. We've got to elevate. We've got to elevate this program and it's about making sure that our players understand it's about accountability, about responsibility and it's about moving this program forward.

I look at the last two years of what we've done in our recruiting and really you look at Malik, Bonney, Connor Williams, you look at three All-Americans last season and our two freshmen corners, we had a lot of freshmen play last year, Chris Warren, but you look at the signing class we just brought in with 28 signees and we got the four players from Baylor and I told the players the other day these are Texas Longhorns and let's welcome them in.

Really happy with the way we worked this off-season. Our team is coming together, a lot of energy and momentum and guys are beginning to believe in one another. One of our themes right now is believe, and I tell 'em all the time, if you don't believe me yourself no one will every believe in you, so it time to start believing in yourself and get this program head back in the right direction.

Q. Coach, obviously going into this season questions are on offense but what about the defense and how do you figure out how to get off the field in third down?

CHARLIE STRONG: We have to be better on defense. You look at our team and you always want to build a team, because if you ever want to be good you have to be good on defense. You look at us last year we were very poor. We were able to stop people on first and second down, but our third down we aren't able to get off the field and it allowed drives to continue on.

But it's all about guys making sure that defensively it's got to be a major improvement. You look at just up front, you've got to be able to have pass rushers and



this is a throwing league, we talk about this being a throwing league. But when you allow teams to run the ball on you, then you're letting them know they can impose their will and we weren't able to make a team one-dimensional at all because they can run the ball and throw the ball and we have to make teams one-dimensional and get off the field on third down and we have to improve on defense.

Q. Coach, you bring in Sterlin Gilbert. How quickly do you think that offense is going to pay off regardless of who the quarterback is this year?

CHARLIE STRONG: We're still working, and Sterlin knows just how quickly and what you would like to see happen is you want to see progress. You want to make sure that you get someone who can command the offense, someone that can move the ball but you have to be very balanced. If we're able to establish a running game, then I think it's going to make it a lot easier for our quarterback because now he's going to be able to make the throws. It's all about being balanced with the run and pass and it's what we're working for.

Q. In your two years you haven't won as much as you would like, but you're two games against Oklahoma. You've played very well. You beat 'em last year, dominated 'em the year before. They had two big returns and beat you. What's been your secret to playing so well in that Cotton Bowl game?

CHARLIE STRONG: I think it is they figure out who they're playing and I wish they would figure that out every week. No, it's about being consistent. When you look at that match-up and it's an unbelievable match-up and when you walk into that game, you're right you can throw the records out the door because they're going to come and they're going to go play. Nothing has to be said. As one game -- that's one game I don't have to even give a pep talk. When be walk out there, when you come back in there is so much energy in the stadium that not much has to be said. Okay, guys, it is time to go play. Let's see what we got today. You would like to see us play like that all the time and that's what we haven't -- you go play well against Oklahoma and then you follow up the next week with a big win and then you lose a game that you never even showed up in and that's on us as a coaching staff.

Q. You'll get asked this a bunch probably today, so

I'll go ahead and do it --

CHARLIE STRONG: I know you would!

Q. Are you at peace with the fact that Texas fans everywhere are going to be counting victories and wanting to see progress and basically this season could be a referendum on whether or not you should stay as a head coach?

CHARLIE STRONG: The expectations here are always high, which they should be and why would you want it any other way. They should. There is no reason for us to go 6-7 and 5-7 and you want to see progress. I totally agree with that and we should, and that's what we're working for. Our goal is to win every game and it's the work to go win those games and they shouldn't be any different.

Q. With the Big 12 moving toward a championship game, what would be your preference for determining who plays in that game?

CHARLIE STRONG: Well, you know what? I think that the commissioners and everyone is doing everything possible to make that happen and, you know, for them to get the facts worked out it really does he want matter to me. Just want to make sure that it's going to be done the right way, because everybody wants to see it happen and you want -- it's good that we're going to have a Big 12 Championship Game.

Q. Charlie, just compare and contrast where the program is when you stepped into it two years ago, where it is now and how far away are you from where you want to be?

CHARLIE STRONG: Well, it's hard to go back because you are always looking for progress each and every year, but you come into -- you come into this season and you feel pretty good about where you are because you look at the two last classes and you have some really good players in those classes, but also you can't overlook the fact that we have a lot of older players in our program, too, that's done a good job.

The guys that got here with Dylan Haines, with Boyette, with Perk and with Bluiett, those guys that are here today. They've done a really good job and they've done a great job now of establishing the program and getting it back to where it should be. You want to see progress and it has to happen, but when you look at the program last year we signed two guys 300-pounds, this year it's nine. But you've got to win the game up front, and it's all big guys and you look at our signees of 2014 were big guys and you want to make sure that happens. You just want to see the development and just make sure that you continue to move it and grow it each and every year.

Q. In the past couple of years you've commented

on the lack of upperclassmen leadership in the program. How do you feel going into this year with your upperclassmen?

CHARLIE STRONG: It's better than it has been, and if you harp on something enough I think they get the message and they've gotten the message now because the four guys I got here, even with Tyrone. Tyrone doesn't say much but he works and he goes about it the right way. Another, Bryce Cottrell, and probably one of my best leaders on the team is Tim Cole. Tim understands his role. He plays behind Malik. But guys respect Tim Cole because of how hard he works and how he carries himself.

Q. With what happened with Art Briles at Baylor, how do you think that's going to affect the recruiting landscape in Texas?

CHARLIE STRONG: You're always look to go improve your recruiting and guys always know this. I'm one of those guys that I like to close late. I always say a lot of times when guys make commitments they're raking a reservation. A lot of times they don't stick to it, so I will always be one of those guys who wants to close late. I tell guys all the time, listen, you go visit wherever you want to visit, commit to whomever you want to commit to. But at the end I'm going to come back and see where your interest is and see if we can somehow convince you to come to the University of Texas.

Q. Shane Buechele, what has he shown you even over the summer that tells you he's ready to compete for this job? Do you think he could start the game against Notre Dame?

CHARLIE STRONG: Well, nothing has changed from Shane from the day one he stepped on campus. I call him one of those guys, you know, you see guys they're gym rats. That's what he is. He's always around the facility. You always see him. I was in there Sunday, getting ready to go down to San Antonio and walked in the game room and him and Collin Johnson were in there shooting pool, and I said, do you ever go to your room?

But he's a guy that -- some guys just have that ability about 'em and you can just tell that, you know what? He's a special young man probably because of the way he was raised with his father, with Steve doing an unbelievable job, and even his mom. I think she is the one who has done a better job than Steve. But you love his overall attitude. But when you have a guy like Shane working the way he works, it rubs off on the whole team. Now everybody is seeing the way he works and they all did it. Last night me and Bluiett was talking about it and Bluiett, every time I walk in the game room and see him and Bluiett there they're shooting pool and Bluiett is like, there's nothing he can't do. Then he goes and plays Ping-Pong and then

he goes and plays basketball and then he goes and plays golf. But just like his overall attitude, within the whole team it's seepin', seepin', seepin'.

Q. You mentioned the four guys you got from Baylor. Do you expect any of them to play this year, or do you see them more as redshirt guys?

CHARLIE STRONG: It's so hard to tell right now because we haven't started practice, but you look at the two Duvernays right there now with Pat Hudson and with J.P., but not only are they good players, but they're unbelievable young men, great character guys. That's why I told our team, it's about us pulling them in, joining together and don't ever make them feel like they don't belong because they do belong and they're going to be a part of the success here.

Q. You had a lot of success with freshmen last year, some freshmen All-American, but even the ones who weren't, John Burt, that group, now you have to rely on another group of freshmen, is it a lot to ask another group of freshmen to come in and really contribute in order for you guys to be successful?

CHARLIE STRONG: When you look at it now, a lot of teams are playing a number of freshmen. But you look at that group that we played last year, we played a large number so now with this group that's coming in, either some of them may have an opportunity to start or they're going to athletic director a lot of depth for us, which you like to see happen. But it's all about the preparation and if you get guys prepared the right way doesn't matter -- you know, sometimes you get concerned about the bigger guys, because now if I'm a freshman defensive lineman or offensive lineman and I'm going against a veteran who has been four or five years into someone's program they're bigger and stronger. So they're going to know a lot more, but skill guys, it's just athlete on athlete and with skill guys you can see it happen, you talk about John Burt, last year coming in as a freshman and contributing the way he does. If a guy can run and jump, he's going to use his athletic ability to overpower someone. So the biggest concern is up front, because you talk about the linemen. So, now you've got to make sure that you bring 'em along and once you bring 'em along watch them develop and let them grow.

Q. You beat Oklahoma and Baylor last year. You still go 5-7. Did you use those as teaching tools, those wins in the off-season, and how can those experiences benefit your guys this fall?

CHARLIE STRONG: You know, what I did is I took -- like the last few weeks, I've taken a game and I've put it on in the building and one week it may be the Oklahoma game and the next week it may be the Iowa State game, but I put on those games for our players to

see and some of them they liked the game and some they did not like, and tried to get me to turn it off, and I said, "Do not touch that TV. Do not turn it off!" You're sitting in the locker room after the Baylor game and guys are just sitting there, and I call them up and talk to them and I said, okay guys time to go and they're looking at me and I said, what's wrong? And they said the season is over. And I said, yes, the season is over but if we had played like this, they should be continuing on. And I think that's the taste left in their mouth because they felt like we should be a team that continued on. Then we get into the Bowl season and I texted a few of them and I said, how do you guys feel now and they were all upset. But you should be, but now it stings a little and it should sting because if you're a competitor, it's going to sting.

Q. Now that you're in your third year I suspect that you have firmly entrenched your culture on your team and in so doing how have you seen that manifest itself in the off-season program and heading into the season?

CHARLIE STRONG: Well, they're taken ownership themselves now and the message is not that I have to stand up and just preach to 'em all the time now. When you talk about just our upperclassmen they're taking it over. They are the ones who are saying, hey, we gotta go do this instead of a coach always saying, hey, you're not working hard. If they see someone not working hard they're being more vocal about it and telling the young man, because now the culture has been set. Once you developed that ownership and once they take the ownership then you let them run it. Not so much they're running the team, but they see what needs to be done, and they know one another and know how hard one another works so now it's more like them calling each other out.

Q. Sooner or later they're going to have to decide the divisions in this new look Big 12. If one Texas-Oklahoma game is monumental, what would two be like if you guys are in opposite divisions?

CHARLIE STRONG: It would be something special. But you know what? You look at it and I think the commissioners and everyone that's involved, they're going to do a great job with it, because when you look at it, the way they're setting it up in the beginning if you play someone early then -- sorry, if you play someone late then you wouldn't have to see them again in the playoff. I think that we'll get it worked out the right way and whomever ends up in it it's going to be a big-time game.

Q. With you hiring Sterlin Gilbert in the off-season, do you feel like he will give you an offense that you kinda need to be competitive here in the Big 12?

CHARLIE STRONG: When you look at the state of

Texas, and we just came back from San Antonio at the Texas High School Coaches Association and the high school coaches are doing an unbelievable job, it's the offense that are set up in this state. All of 'em are wide open. Now when you bring in a coach who has been involved with that offense, it's amazing how it takes off. I'm sitting out there and, like, you take a guy like Dave Young, he just came in, he knows the offense and he can make the calls.

Lorenzo Joe, all those guys have been in the offense, so it makes it that much easier for them to adapt to it. You don't have to do a lot. A lot of times people think there is so much going on. It isn't a lot going on. It's all about you taking advantage of what a defense gives and then you're able to get the right guy behind the center and let him make the throws for you and get you in the right place.

Q. Charlie, can you tell us more about Shane on the field? What type of quarterback he is, strength and areas he can improve upon?

CHARLIE STRONG: When you look at him on the field he's -- he just puts the ball in the right place and he understands the offense, but he's going to study the game and he does a really good job of setting the game and he can always get better. You can always improve. The thing he needs to do now and he's working on it is getting bigger and stronger because he understands he's going to take some hits. We haven't hit him. We can hit Swoopes because he's bigger and he tries to run him over anyway way. So they don't want to hit Swoopes. But with Shane, it's about him getting bigger and stronger. He'll get better, all those quarterbacks, you know, they're going to get better because they're willing to work and when you're willing to work and you put in the time you'll get better.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your comments.

CHARLIE STRONG: Thank you.