

July 30, 2013



An Interview With:

LOUISVILLE COACH CHARLIE STRONG

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Head Coach Charlie Strong. They've brought with them quarterback Teddy Bridgewater, safety Hakeem Smith, wide receiver Damian Copeland, and linebacker Preston Brown. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH STRONG: Really happy to be a part of this day and really excited about being a part of this league. Really excited about the upcoming season. Our players work really hard, but there's been really some real unrealistic expectations placed upon this football team.

And the thing we're going to have to do as a team is a lot of questions has to be answered. Number one, we'll be a team that can continue to focus week in and week out.

Can we be a team that's going to be prepared week in week out?

Is this going to be a team that's going to get complacent. I know now we've been picked to win the conference. I think about four years ago, just standing here and we were picked last, even the next year, the second year, we were picked last.

Last year we were picked to win it and this year we're picked to win it. So two years we're being picked last, and these next two we've been picked to go win this conference.

But it's a tribute to the hard work that our players have made over the years and I'm so excited. You think back just how far this program have come and what we put into this program. Coaching staff has done a great job, our players have done a great job. It's all about us. Can we adapt and can we change and can we continue to move this program forward?

We want to make this one of the best programs in the country. And the only way that's going to happen is our players have to continue to work hard, our players have to continue to prepare hard. Our coaches have to continue to work hard. Our coaches have to continue to prepare hard. But we're really excited about this upcoming season and we're looking forward to the challenge.

Q. How has Teddy handled a lot more attention, publicity? And how is he equipped do you think as the season starts when it becomes a possible distraction?

COACH STRONG: I think that Teddy is an amazing young man. But he's surrounded by some outstanding players himself. But he's a very humble young man. If you look at him, just watching him grow over the years, he's loaded with a ton of athletic ability, but just getting to know him as a person.

And Teddy understands that at first, I think that when you look back, he really didn't want this team and he didn't want to be the leader of his team, but just the way he's grown and developed, he has no choice now. And he's ready to welcome that challenge. But it's been fun to just watch his development.

And I think that he can handle it. I think that he knows what's ahead of him and what he has to get accomplished.

Q. Charlie, you've always been one to kind of take statistics and use them as motivation. Will you use the two votes that you guys didn't get that it wasn't unanimous? We've been hearing a lot the whole off-season about what this season was going to be for you guys but it wasn't a unanimous decision.

COACH STRONG: No, I won't take those two votes because our team -- what we try to do as a football team, what I try to do each and every week is not so much that we focus on the opponent but we focus on ourselves. And what's

key for us is that we have to get better and see if we can go be the best each and every day as a player.

And if our players can go develop each and every day, then they will know -- they know their ability and what they had to go -- try to go get accomplished.

So it's not so much that we have to worry about the opponent, but let's worry about ourselves and let's take it game by game, which we will, but let's make sure that as a player, that we're getting better and we're giving every effort and everything we have to give to make this program a good program.

Q. I know you told Pete that you're still in the decision process on Michael Dyer. I know that you're limited on what you can say about that, but what would you say to those who would say bringing in a player like that potentially would go against some of the core values that you put up in your offense?

COACH STRONG: He's not part of our program. And when you talk about he's not been a part of our program, our core values are within our program and the men that in our program, and they understand our core values and what they're all about. But it's for the players that are within our program.

Q. When it comes to Teddy, what have you learned about him as a person, away from football, that maybe you didn't know during the recruiting process that has sort of wowed you?

COACH STRONG: Well, the thing that Teddy has is strong faith, and I didn't know it during the recruiting process, but his mom with her illness, and then with him watching that happen to her, it just made him stronger.

And what she's done, not only with Teddy, with her other children, they're really strong kids and they can handle any adversity within their life. And that's what he's been able -- that's why he's been able to overcome the adversities he's had in his life, because of his upbringing.

Q. I know you just mentioned unrealistic expectations but you also said that you want to be the best football program in the country. What would him winning the Heisman mean for your program? What would it do for your program?

COACH STRONG: It would speak volumes to our program and just where we've

come and his individual effort and what he's put into it. But what we'd like to do is so much social media, we don't have to push him for that Heisman, because just how he plays is going to determine what he does and how this team plays with the Heisman Trophy and where it's going to end up for him.

Q. I know you've coached teams that were coming back from National Championships. Is this challenge of coaching this team any different as you see it from others that you've seen? Is there any you can compare it to?

COACH STRONG: When I think about it, Gary, and I think about that team in '09 and when Tebow made that announcement that he was coming back, and on defense that year, we had 21 to 22 returners coming back at Florida. And offensively you had Tebow, you had Percy Harvin, you had the Pounceys, and Riley Cooper, you had some really outstanding players coming back.

And what happened with that football team, which I don't want to see happen with our team, is that when it became a sigh of relief and it was like you win a game, you're like, ah, we won the game, and you get on to the next one.

And luckily we did not lose a game until that last game against Alabama in a championship game, and it was devastating. That's what I want to see happen to our team is that a loss will come devastating our program because we're going to have to overcome some adversity. There's going to be some games where we're not going to play. There will be some games we're going to be favored and we may walk out of there with a three-point victory, but who cares? We won the game. Are people going to say you didn't beat them by 30? It's all about us making sure that we maintain our focus and making sure, you know what, guys, at the end of the day, just win the football game.

And I'm not going to allow that to happen where winning becomes a sigh of relief. Hey, we're happy, now let's get on with the next opponent, but let's enjoy this win.

Q. There's a lot of changes in the league, some holdovers, a lot of new members. Do you feel that across the board you guys kind of have a bull's eye on your back due to the nature of last season, the way you finished

and the expectations for this year? Is that inherent to being the defending conference champs? Or do you feel this is heightened because of the expectations?

COACH STRONG: I just think that our program is nowhere near where it should be. We will always be a team that's always looking to improve. We'll always be a team that's going to be the hunter. There's no bull's eye on our back.

I think a lot of times when you talk about having a bull's eye on your back, it means you reached a level where you're stopping, you don't want to grow anymore. But we want to continue to grow, so we're always going to be the hunter.

When we're looking for teams -- and I know there's a lot of teams out there. You talk about this league, this is an outstanding league. There's really good teams in this league with outstanding football players. By no means do we think we're the top level team in this league. Each and every week we're going to have to go out and prove it.

And you think about Cincinnati. They were picked second. There's Rutgers still in this league. There's South Florida. Central Florida. There's Connecticut. SMU.

There's some really good teams in this league. So let's not overlook anyone. Let's not think we're better than anyone else.

Q. When you came in, you guys used a lot of freshmen the first two years. You had to use a lot of freshmen. This year the competition, could you just talk about what it's going to be like in preseason, the competition, especially on offense, maybe wide receiver, and how guys are going to get better because you've got so much depth you've now that you've built through recruiting.

COACH STRONG: You like to think that we have enough players in our league where we can and practice and feel good about practicing, where you feel if you do -- if for some reason you do lose a player, you have someone that's a comparable backup that can come in and replace him.

That's what we're trying to do during the recruiting process, to continue to build depth within our program and making sure -- just making sure you have really outstanding players that go replace a player.

I was just thinking, looking at our defensive backs, I told Vance, we have something called filled corner. We stand there with four scholarships

guys that filled corner that have never been before. And I was just thinking back, just over the years, you may have a couple of scholarship players and a couple of walk-ons, but it's like that. And we're continue to build. And we'd need to. We'd need to continue to build. We'd need to build our offense and defensive line the way we are building our skilled position.

If you look at the wide receiver position, you can go DeVante Parker, you can go Cope, you go Eli Rogers. You go now -- with Milton coming in as a transfer that's coming there. Robert Clark is a transfer. There's James Quick.

At the tight end position you go B.J. Butler. You go Gerald Christian. You go Jalen Harrington. You go Hubbell. So you're building guys there which we didn't have before. Now that we need to continue to build. The way we built at the skilled position, we need to build that at the offensive and defensive line.

Q. You talked earlier about the noise and you say that a lot. How do you keep this team focused and not listen to the outside noise, the expectations? How do you keep this team focused when you get them in camp?

COACH STRONG: The theme for us is going to be either we're growing or we're dying. If we're growing, we're trying to get better each and every day and we're trying to improve the program.

If we're dying, we'll be at the program that's just going to want to maintain. We don't want to get better. We'll become complacent. And that's what we can't do. We can't become complacent. We can't be self-absorbed, or we get cocky. We get arrogant. Because there's still a lot of questions and this team still has a lot of room for improvement.

Like I said, we're nowhere near where we should be and we can get better. You look at the games we lost last year, we're sitting there, we're playing pretty good. We're 8-0. We go to Syracuse, they slap us pretty good. We come back at home against Connecticut. They beat us. Then we had to go into a game where we have to go win on the road against Rutgers.

I tell them all the time, guys, the measuring stick of this team is going to be measured to that Florida game. And we played very well in that game. So now everyone is going to expect you to play each game the way you played in that game, and it's not going to happen.

So let's not get full of ourselves and let's not think that we have all the answers because the moment you do, you will walk into a game, you'll get into a week where you won't practice well and you'll go get it put on you pretty good. And then that would be a wake-up call.

We don't need any wake-up calls. We need to hit the alarm button before somebody comes in there and puts it on us really good.

So it's about us making sure we maintain our focus. And the preparation has to be there, the commitment has to be there, the right attitude.

Our players need to have an attitude of each and every week, that attitude of myself, I want to go get better as a coach, as a player, as a whole program. And if that happens within our program then we have a chance. But we have to make sure that that happens and it happens each and every day. And if that happens, then we'll be able to carry it on through the year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports