

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: I see coach is joining us.

PAT NARDUZZI: Hi, everybody. How we doing today?

It is game week. I asked our staff the other day, might have been Sunday, How many guys thought we'd get to game week? There wasn't too many hands raised up in the air. But we are here.

Had a team meeting last night. Our kids are excited. A little different excitement. As we've talked weeks ago, I'm not sure if kids thought we'd get here either. If our coaches aren't believing it, then I'm certainly sure our players weren't as well. But we've gotten here.

Our kids are excited. There was a buzz last night. I'm excited. We get into the normal game week. We got a really good Austin Peay team that we'll talk about. I'm sure you guys got some questions about them.

Rehearsal scrimmage on Friday. Debated whether to have it Friday or Saturday. Got it in Friday. Very detailed, focused. Happy with the way we came out of that as far as all the details of a game.

It wasn't a physical scrimmage. It was one of the better ones we've had here. Sometimes when they know it's not a full-contact scrimmage, it's not what you want it to do, but it was a good scrimmage.

With that I'll open it up for questions and let you guys roll.

**Q. How confident are you in your offensive line?
Really experienced on the left side, not as experienced
on the right side.**

PAT NARDUZZI: How confident? I'm really confident. I'm confident till I'm not confident, right? Shoot, I've got a lot of confidence. You talk about the left side with Carter and Bryce Hargrove over there. You got Jimmy in the middle, Jimmy Morrissey sitting in the middle. You got Kradel who has played good football. Gabe Houy has been really good.

The Wilson kid, which you haven't seen play yet, is coming along every day. Matt Goncalves is a guy that has shown he can play tackle and guard. We have a swing guy there.

I'm excited about where we are. Again, that's why you play games. We're going to find out who they are, what they are, what this 2020 team looks like Saturday at 4:00. That's when I'll have even more confidence.

Q. We got this depth chart. We'll seeing Wendell Davis in the middle linebacker job. What did he do in camp to win that job?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think I mentioned it to you a week and a half ago, two weeks ago. It's called consistency. He was just steady. I mean, the guy hasn't missed a practice, hasn't missed a beat. He's been sharp with getting everybody lined up. Just consistent. He knows what's going on.

The first day we come out with game plan rules as far as what he's going to do up front and everything. He comes out and doesn't miss a beat. He's just been consistent.

Chase Pine has been good, too. It's been a battle in there. He's been physical. He just hasn't stopped doing what he did the first day. Sometimes you see a guy go like this, be up and down, ride the waves. He's been very, very consistent.

Q. It says Davis Beville or Joey Yellen at backup quarterback. Is that something you need more time to figure out?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, Patti has been good, too. Don't forget Nick. You can't put four quarterbacks on there. Nick missed a little bit of time being nicked up (smiling).

It's a work in progress really. When you look at it, Joey has come in, it's a new thing. Davis has played outstanding. If you went around the room, you'd have guys say both of them are the number two. We'll find out when game time comes around and they get that opportunity.

We've been happy with Davis. Been happy with Joey, as well. They're meeting with Coach Whipple right now. They're all getting schooled up.



Q. About the offensive line, you mentioned a few weeks ago about getting the running game going. How do you feel about what you've accomplished up to this point?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's always hard. We'll find out on game day. Our defense is pretty stout versus the run, as you know. It hasn't gotten weaker. It's gotten strong. We'll find out on game day if it really has.

It is so hard to tell against our defense and defensive line, the way we attack the line of scrimmage with our linebackers. So we're going to find out. There's a group of tailbacks there, we're going to find out who gets hot and who is making plays. We'll find out who our starter is.

If a guy gets in there, trips, falls down, probably not going to see the next series. It's going to be who shows up at game time, game day, and gets the work done. But I got trust in every one of them.

Daniel Carter has been hot since the beginning. He's been consistent like Wendell at the middle linebacker. Vince is talented. Izzy is talented. We know obviously A.J. Davis has played a lot of football for us. There's a lot of talented guys there. We'll have some different packages for each of them, give them an opportunity to go showcase what they have.

Our run game has to be better. We're going to find out soon as far as just what we have, how much better we are than what we were a year ago. But we talked about it last night, just a rushing game of stopping the run. We've got to have a run game to be successful this year.

Q. You got to see Austin Peay open up the college football season. Overall they're a solid football team, but lost their opener. What do you see about this team that's put up a lot of wins over the last few years?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, won 11 games, quarterfinalist, No. 13 pre-season rank. Coach Lovings was there a year ago as the D-line coach, is interim coach now.

They're a talented football team, make no mistakes about it. They're talented, tough, physical. You can tell they love to play the game. When you watch them play, they just play with an attitude. They were down some guys. I don't know if it was injuries, COVID, I don't know what it was. We don't get those. Maybe Jerry can find out, do some hunting down in Tennessee.

The DeAngelo Wilson kid, All-American wideout, did not play. Obviously they didn't have a long snapper in that

game. They struggled in the punt game, which probably cost them the game.

But they're talented on both sides of the ball. You have to love what you see on tape as far as a football team goes.

Q. It's early in the week, but you mentioned the whole COVID thing. Do you have any players that you expect that will miss this Saturday's game because of COVID?

PAT NARDUZZI: No. There's nobody I expect. Our kids have been outstanding, guys. My hat goes off to them. We're playing a season because of them. Our coaches have been great. Our support staff has been outstanding in this office, like we expect, since June 1st. The kids have the harder parts. They're college kids, roaming around campus. We don't expect anybody at this time.

You know what, there's a long time to go to game time. I'm glad there's no bonfire, okay, on Thursday. So many things that could have happened if there was a bonfire. We'll miss it, seeing the Panther Pit, the band, everybody there. It's just going to be a different year.

But I don't expect to lose anybody. We tested yesterday as a team. This is a weekly deal. I can tell you, whatever I want on Monday, doesn't matter, because we haven't got the results back from a Sunday test. We'll have another test on Wednesday. As a coach, you hope you get the results back from the one test before you take the next test. The company has 72 hours to get it to you. They've been pretty darn good as far as getting them to us when we need to.

Friday is a whole new test, which has come on in the last month as far as finding the guidelines to it. It's a PCR test. They're going up each nostril, this company, both sides. They're not saying, Let's see what's in the right or left. To me, I feel really comfortable with that. I think you're going to have less false positives or false negatives that way.

We did that on Sunday, like I said. Wednesday. Friday, they're going to do it twice. I explained this whole testing procedure for the first time to our kids last night. Friday they're going to go up the right nostril, up the left nostril with the same thing. Stick it in the vial. Break off the end, close it up. Then they're going to do it again.

On game day, when we get the results, if someone were to come up positive, they can go back to the other one and make sure. If it's positive-positive, obviously they're out. If it's a positive-negative, they go with the negative saying it was a false positive. It's not like, Hey, I tested positive, can I get another test? It's already ready to go. There's no time.

I pray Mako and the testing companies on Friday can get this thing going quickly so our kids can get mentally locked in knowing they're ready to go and I'm good. Whether it's Friday night in a hotel, someone serving you, who made the mashed potatoes, who has the broccoli. I mean, our kids, like I said, have been great to this point. We're going to continue to make sure they're doing everything right.

Q. What is your message to the backups? Things could change in an instant for you.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, they've all got to be ready. They know that. Our third team got to be ready. Everybody's got to be ready. It's a sudden change at any point if something crazy happens. Not only the guy that tests positive, but the tracing that goes along with that can hit you worse than the guy testing positive. You're never feeling comfortable.

We've got to get enough guys that know what they're doing. It could hit you pretty fast where, I mean, you can't get possibly everybody. We have a 20-hours-a-week rule. You can't possibly have extra practices for other guys. Just can't happen. That's where it gets dicey.

Q. You had Williams at the starting spot at corner where Damarri Mathis was. What did he do to win that job? How comfortable are you with him taking over that role, which is a pretty important one for you?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm comfortable with him. Also comfortable with A.J. Woods. This depth chart is the depth chart. How does he practice this week? How does he attack a game week? Does he know his opponent. Go out there and playing like he's playing Pitt? Now he has to look going versus Austin Peay in practice.

A.J. has been good. We have some freshmen corners that have played awful well, as well. Rashad Battle kid, Jahvante Royal, those guys have played well. They're long, athletic, they're sharp, sharp mentally. We have a few guys that can play out there.

Right now, Quez is the guy. What he's done is be consistent. He knows the defense, tackled really well, be consistent. He's made plays on the ball. That's what we expect our guys to do, obviously besides knowing what they're doing.

Q. You mentioned a fair amount of first-year players. Would you say this incoming class has impressed you with their mentality and approach? Are you surprised there are so many first-years being able to step up, contribute right away?

PAT NARDUZZI: The rookies have been really good. The rookies have been better than most. I don't know why. Maybe we've done a better job as coaches. You see those guys in Coach Powell's office every morning early. The D-line is in the D-line meeting with Coach Partridge early. All extra meetings. Just those guys.

Bengally Kamara, that guy looks like he can be a special teams guru now. Although he may not play at linebacker this year, Bengally has been really, really good. He's a football player. He loves the game.

Solmon DeShields, the same thing. A lot of guys that are going to play special teams. We have a talented group. Just because a guy doesn't play, hard for Dayon Hayes, Rashad Weaver, we don't talk a lot about, back to Rashad, people better watch out. They're worried about 91 on one side, they have 17 on the other side they have to deal with, too.

Dayon Hayes is going to be talented. Because of the depth at that position, it doesn't look that way. He's going to be good as well.

I love our freshman class. Obviously they have a long way to go to be what some of our seniors are right now. They're well on their way to that.

Q. Cornerback question. You have a senior who played a lot of football on one side, of course Quez on the other side. Do you think maybe teams might try to target the younger guy? Is Quez built character-wise to welcome such a thing?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's from South Florida. He's done it in games. As soon as we go in the game, we say, Quez, they're going right at you. Mathis is out, J.P. is out. They're coming at you. He's done a great job of making plays one way or another. We have some change-up for him. He's equipped.

Jerry, you lack a lot of confidence, that's all I know. Everything is, Are you afraid? Do you have confidence? I see you're just a really kind of... I don't know if this quarantine is wearing you out or what, or your wife is wearing you out, one or the other.

We're not afraid. We have a lot of confidence. You're on mute, too (laughter).

Q. Don't worry about me (laughter).

You mentioned some of these young guys working on special teams. Does the blanket waiver for eligibility make

it easier? If you think a guys is a special teams contributor, you can give him the green light right now?

PAT NARDUZZI: It does. That helps a ton. We're not worried about it. But we're not going to play guys just to play them. They better be as good as what would have been in there or better. That's what our kids have done so far. They've paid attention to it. They're interested in special teams. A lot of times those guys are, I want to be a starting this or that. These guys have really bought into the special teams. I think it's going to help us a lot.

Q. Devin Danielson listed as the starting defensive tackle. What is the rotation going to be like behind him? They're all young guys.

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, it's going to be like the runningback position: Who is making the plays? Who is getting it done when they're out there? I think we'll know a lot more after this first game, the opener, as far as who is the guy, who is going to get more reps the next week and who is going to get less. It all happens on game day.

We can play against us and hit each other all day, but until they go out in the game when the lights go on in Heinz Field, which we haven't had an opportunity since November. That's probably my biggest concern, Jerry, I'm concerned, a little afraid, of not getting into Heinz Field. I think it's important to get in there. We just haven't been able to get there for whatever reason.

Q. I notice it looks like Michael Smith is not on the roster any more. Is he off the team?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. I didn't tell you that?

Q. If you did, I missed it.

PAT NARDUZZI: Maybe I didn't. He's been off for a while. I apologize not getting to you. I'm trying to think of the names. Who else was medicaled early? We talked about this.

Q. Dontavius.

PAT NARDUZZI: That's what it was. We talked about that. Dontavius was medical, so was Michael. Michael had I guess a lower back injury. Again, nothing critical. He was out there for a long time, put it that way. He was out there for camp, didn't seem to be getting any better. Didn't seem like he was going to be able to make it.

I feel bad for Michael, but he's going to get his degree. He's staying here in school. But he is medicaled. He will not play for us this year. Great kid.

Q. I feel like we ask you this every year before the season opener, a question of: Do you hold things back, open everything up? You're not going to give a specific answer, but has your philosophy or your approach to that changed over the years? Where is it 2020 versus 2015?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's about the same. It's back and forth. A little bit of this, a little bit of that, okay? I say that, and it's like there's certain things you want to show, there's certain things you don't want to show. There's certain things you want the next opponent to have to work on, then there's certain things that you don't. Kind of a little bit of both. What do you want them to worry about on the next game?

But ultimately the most important thing is to come out of this thing with a win. Austin Peay will not be easy. That's the goal. In the fourth quarter or third quarter we have to bring something out we're planning on trying to hold on any side of the ball. We'll do that. Certain things you don't want to show that you have, certain things you want to show just to find out what people are going to do when they see that dilemma.

Q. Just wanted to confirm. Jordan Addison listed as a starting returner on kick and punt returns. I take it he finished really strong in camp and how he's looking at the returner position.

PAT NARDUZZI: He's been consistent. Again, we're always looking for consistency. I think that's the key, knowing what you're going to get day in, day out. I feel like Heinz Field, haven't seen him do it there yet. Jordan has been as consistent as you can be.

If I had to pick two consistent players, maybe more than two. Golly, Kenny Pickett has been really consistent, so has Jordan Addison, so has Wendell, so has Damar Hamlin, Patrick Jones, Rashad Weaver.

I put him in that category. He's just a puppy right now. Very, very consistent. I can count on one hand the amount of drops he's ever had. You're almost shocked if you see him drop a football. Now he's got to go do it when the lights come on.

Q. On the outside with wideouts, what is that battle? Kind of a battle for time going on between Taysir and Jared here?

PAT NARDUZZI: Tipton, as well. There's a battle going on for sure. There's a battle every day. But that's a good problem. Jared and Taysir, it's a 1-2 punch. Both those guys at any time can go out and get it done. We're excited

about them all.

Again, the way we like to throw it, it's nice to have more than just one guy you can rely on out there wide.

Q. What has been the transition been like for Lucas Krull?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think he can have a big impact. It's Heinz Field, being the guy, the dude. I think Lucas can. I was just talking to Damar Hamlin out on the patio watching Steelers practice. He is like, That guy is a presence on the field. Talking about a safety, you got to cover him. Oh, man, he's a different guy. He can run, catch. He plays with an attitude. He has fun playing the game.

I think he can have an impact. We'll find out Saturday.

Q. About the COVID, do you expect to start the week this week with everybody ready to go? My wi-fi went out.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes, I do. Like I said, Jerry, when your wi-fi was out, there's a lot of testing to go, right? We tested yesterday. I don't know if you heard that. We're going to test on Wednesday. Then we have kind of a double whammy on Friday.

There's a lot of testing to go. You just hope it's accurate. That's the thing that scares me. You hope there's accuracy in this testing. You hate for a guy to lose a game or lose 14 days, for that matter, because of a false positive. That's all scary stuff.

We expect to have everybody at this point, okay, as I stand here today.

Q. Is Bryce still with the team?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes. He's been banged up. Trying to think. Had to be back before spring ball. No, it was during spring break. He was hurt in a non-football deal. He has not participated yet, but he's still with us.

We're looking at that daily. He's been banged up. Again, went home for spring break, COVID hit, never came back. I believe that's the timetable. It's been a while.

Q. Gabe Houy, he's a guy who was at guard last year, lost his job. I think he had two surgeries over the off-season, at least one, moves back to tackle, wins a starting job. What kind of progress has he made from November of last year until now?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I don't know if he ever lost his job.

But he's played both tackle and guard for us. I don't know if I'd ever say he lost his job. Gabe is a good football player for us. We have a lot of faith and trust in Gabe.

He was banged up and injured probably more than anybody knows. It's probably more of that than losing a job. He's been real, really sound for us. We need to keep him healthy obviously. That's going to be critical at that position.

Again, he can still go in and play guard, he can still play tackle. He's a guy we still have trained both. Gabe has done a heck of a job for us in all aspects of the team, period, on and off the field. We're happy he's with us. We're happy he's healthy now, too. He is healthy.

Q. Is he a more natural tackle than guard?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'd probably say that because of his length. If you asked him which one he is, he'd say, I'm a tackle. I think he could be a left tackle as well. He's athletic. Great feet.

Q. Two surgeries in the off-season?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't remember.

THE MODERATOR: With that we will wrap things up. Coach, thank you very much for your time. Thank you for joining us virtually.

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