

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: I see coach has joined us. We will hand things off to him.

PAT NARDUZZI: Hi, guys. Happy Monday. Happy Monday.

Obviously was happy with where we were last week, the results of Saturday's game against Austin Peay. Like I told the kids last night, always give them the same message, it's not who we beat, it's how we beat them. To me that's what it is.

Obviously Syracuse had a top-25 team they played. We didn't have a top-25 team. I think to their advantage they've been in a war already. They were in a war for three quarters. They're probably better prepared for Saturday than we are at noon.

I was happy with the way our kids responded. Happy to get a lot of guys in the game. I was happy really with the first half offensively and defensively as far as how our kids reacted, approached the game. I talked about almost 70 players playing in the game. I think we had eight receivers catch their first ball in a Pitt uniform. Eight new ones. Wow. Kenny spread the ball around, got it to where it needed to be. I think we were good there.

Then you move on to Syracuse. Dino Babers, got a lot of respect for him as a football coach, as a person and as a friend. He's a guy that I'll hang out when we get opportunities. Like I said, really, really like him and his wife. So you always hate to go against someone you really, really like.

They got two new coordinators on offense and defense. Not sure what you're going to get. I think offensively their offense is very similar to what they've got. Coach Babers is always going to get somebody that is in his backyard. Got a guy that formerly worked with him. We see similar stuff.

Obviously prepare for four years' worth of stuff, go back and look at four years' worth of what Coach Babers and



that offense have done against us.

Defense is a little different, 3-4, a little four down. Their strength is in their secondary with Andre Cisco being the leader back there. Nice pick against North Carolina.

Offensively Tommy DeVito runs the show. Taj Harris is a play-maker. They had really two of them last year that were really good. They got another young kid from Orlando, No. 14, playing really well. They've targeted him a few times as well. Obviously we have to be all over Taj. He caught a deep ball on us last year coming out. We didn't play it very well. We'll have to play a lot better than we did a year ago.

Questions.

Q. Last year you kind of got after Syracuse's quarterbacks with nine sacks. The score and everything aside, what do you remember about watching that pass-rush at that point in the season?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not much. What do I remember? Our kids played relentless up there. We had a good rush. What else is there? We had a lot of good rushes last year. So I'm moving on to next year. What happened last year doesn't matter. What happened four years ago when it was 76 to whatever, 66, I ain't worried about that game either. The pressure we had last year doesn't matter. It's what are you going to do this year.

They'll be prepared for some of the things we did a year ago, so we have to have a different game plan, do some things a little bit different, try to figure this whole thing out.

Q. Obviously you had a huge physical advantage on Saturday. How did your guys on offense and defense grade out as far as fundamentally and schematically?

PAT NARDUZZI: Obviously pretty good, when you take the first six series and score touchdowns. Again, when you watch the tape, you grade it based on the opponent, based on what you see.

I walked in there last night team meeting, said, Hey, nice win. Defense, can you get any better? Oh, yeah. Offense, can you get any better? Special teams? We watched as a team. They know they can get a lot better.



Was it perfect? No way. But can they get better? There's no question about it.

Again, happy where we are coming out. I think four penalties, five penalties maybe on the day. Nothing major. Defensively one I believe. Was kind of a ticky-tacky one, on an interception. Our guys were disciplined, they did the right thing. They graded out pretty good, obviously, especially that first group.

Going back, I didn't mention this I don't think in the postgame, Chris punted the ball really well. Kirk had a nice day. We were happy with where he was as far as kicking the football.

Q. Specifically with Woods and Williams, how you thought those two played in place of Damarri?

PAT NARDUZZI: They both did some nice things. A.J. got beat one time, got spun around, didn't play it very well. His first time playing corner in a game. I think he'll just continue to get better.

I thought ^ Marquez did a good job in there. He's physical, makes some nice tackles. Leverage-wise he has to be careful. Took a couple shots, made some nice tackles on some quick screens. He has to be a little bit better as far as where he goes on that, the approach to the tackle. But I thought both of them played solid out there.

Again, they're going to keep getting better week in, week out. Again, as I tell you guys, you probably get sick of hearing it, week one to week two we're going to make some improvements.

Q. Kenny spread the ball around, Mack, Wayne, Tipton didn't play. How do you see that evolving throughout the season once those guys get back in the lineup?

PAT NARDUZZI: We'll find out. When they get back in the lineup, we'll adjust when that happens. Just happy with what those young guys are doing. They got to do a better job blocking in the run game so we can have some explosives in the run game. Those guys did a great job out there.

Jaylon Barden was a surprise. I think we kind of saw Addison in spring ball, knew this guy has a chance. Barden stormed into the scene. Has great speed. Obviously can make plays.

Q. Running with DeVito a little bit more, at least for one game this year. What does that do to your pass-rush? Do you have to be more cognizant of those guys? They're not rushing the passer, but have

to account for them in the running game as well.

PAT NARDUZZI: There's a little bit of the running game. Again, like everybody, more and more scrambles. It should not slow it down at all. We're going to read our keys up front. Something will tell us run, whether it's a quarterback up counter that they ran against North Carolina, they've run those in the past. Quarterback draw, we expect to get because it's hurt us in the past a little bit through the years. Why not block it and let them run, which they have not done. I don't think we've seen it in four years. You always expect the unexpected.

But it's not going to slow the pass-rush down at all.

Q. Your first week dealing with COVID protocols during a game week. How happy were you with how your players and coaches and staff dealt with those new COVID protocols?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, we've been dealing with it. Game week is no different than last week. Last week was game week. We tested yesterday. Waiting for results. We'll just continue to move forward.

But I feel safe as I can be in this building and with the people that I'm surrounding myself with, staff and players. I trust our players when they walk down the hallway are doing the right things, when us old people are walking through the facility.

Q. Do you expect any adjustments after last week?

PAT NARDUZZI: What kind of adjustments?

Q. Changes in the way things are handled, just to try to prevent any players being held out on Saturday again, things you can control.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, there's nothing I can control unless they come sleep in my house. They're going to have to... Things happen, you don't know how they happen. But like I said, this building is safe. I feel good when they're here. I can't baby-sit them every minute of the day.

We talk about it all the time, about being safe. Just hope they're being safe out there, washing their hands. That is the key: wearing a mask, wash your hands, I think you're pretty good.

Q. Last week on the punt return, Jordan Addison and Damar Hamlin were wearing No. 3. Was that a mental error on someone's part?

PAT NARDUZZI: A little bit. We kind of covered it in special teams. Originally Damar was starting on our punt block team. We took Damar, he wanted to be on that team. Damar was, Coach, I want to be on that team. He was on our punt block team. We ended up taking him off because we knew we weren't taking No. 3 off our punt return guy. We took Damar off that, figured we were set.

A couple fourth down and shorts, we went to punt safe. We take one of our safeties out. We took No. 12 out, left 3 in there. That's kind of what we ran into by accident. First game things that happen. We probably have, me and John Ford, in operations, went through all the numbers. Actually changed a couple guys' jerseys. You saw Brandon Hill came out in No. 9, as opposed to 22. He was excited to get that change. Special teams deal. We forgot punt safe, which is one of the things that got us in trouble.

Then we had Brandon Hill in No. 9, and we thought that was good until D.J. went back. We'll make sure we get our substitutions right this week. I thank those officials for missing that.

Q. There were a couple of situations in the game where I think when Davis was out there, you went for it on a fourth and three. You called a timeout to try to get Alex out there for a late field goal. The game was out of control at that point. To get those kind of sets, get that kind of repetition, comfort in those situations, how important was that to be able to leverage those opportunities?

PAT NARDUZZI: It was real important for every position. Obviously took Kes out of there. I thought the score here, what are we doing kicking Kes? If somebody runs into him and he gets hurt, that's one thing. Sounded weird, I called a timeout, froze our whole deal.

When you get into situations like that, you learn something as a coach. Like I said, we learn every day from our players. We put a new kicker out there, Ben goes out there to kick. Kyle has never snapped to a left-footed kicker, the holder going on the other side, which kind of messed him up a little bit. I can't remember the last time he had a bad snap. That's all on me. We should have changed the holder, snapper, and the kicker at the same time. So I'll take that point against me.

But all those things are critical. If you ever got in a problem, can Ben kick an extra point? Wouldn't have put him out there for a field goal situation his first one, but I certainly wanted to give him an extra point if that's what you're asking.

Q. Any update on Haba as well?

PAT NARDUZZI: I thought Jerry was going to ask that question. Jerry, you want to ask it? It's Monday, c'mon.

Q. John asked a good question. Go ahead.

PAT NARDUZZI: He's day-to-day. We'll see.

Q. When does the quarantine clock start on those seven guys that COVID-related absentees on Saturday? Is it a 14-day thing? When does it start?

PAT NARDUZZI: Starts when you test positive. So the day of the test. Let's say Coach Narduzzi tests positive on Sunday. For me, it would be 10 days from the day I tested.

Q. It's a 10-day quarantine. Those guys won't be available on Saturday?

PAT NARDUZZI: Correct.

Q. You're not going to say when they tested positive or whether they'll be available Saturday?

PAT NARDUZZI: Correct.

Q. What is your reaction to being in the top 25?

PAT NARDUZZI: Correct (laughter).

No, I mean, no reaction. It doesn't matter. Again, it's where you are at the end of the season. I don't really care about it. I'm glad Jerry voted for us, at least he pretended like he did. Congratulations, Jerry. Appreciate it.

Doesn't matter. I don't want our kids to look at it. I'd rather be disrespected, play with a grudge, chip on our shoulder. We know what kind of football team we have in here. It doesn't matter what people think on the outside. It's what we do on the field.

With less conferences out there, doesn't matter. Less people playing. Matters less this year than a year ago. Our job is to go out and win football games on Saturdays.

Q. Were the kids happy with the win? Are they not satisfied?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't think anybody expects to win. If they'd go out and played like they were supposed to, that's what it's supposed to look like. That is what it's supposed to look like in a perfect world.

They were pretty perfect in the first half. I think they were happy. But I think they're also hungry. It's my job as a

head coach to make sure they continue to stay hungry, which we'll do this week.

Q. How do you feel Tyler Bentley and Devin, Calijah and David, guys on the interior, did?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think they did a nice job. Devin maybe could have had a sack one time. He threw the ball so quick, couldn't get there. Depends on how deep you're throwing it, how short you're throwing it. But I thought they did a great job in there. Devin, Tyler. Calijah had a nice day as well. All those guys inside played well, like I thought they would. We'll just continue to get better every week.

Q. I know it was late in the game, but did Dayon Hayes do anything to get himself a role moving forward?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, he did. He did. We got some depth at that spot. For the future, things are going to be pretty good. Got to bring him back to earth. I may take his phone away because he's tweeting a lot, feeling really good. We'll get him back to earth and get him away from Mars.

Dayon is an unbelievable kid, just a great kid to coach. You're happy for a guy to go in there. Him and Nate Temple, Nate got a nice hit on the quarterback as well. Both those guys were on scout field all last week, what we call rocks. Didn't take a snap on defense. Neither did Bengali, A.J. Woods. It was recall from two weeks ago, last time they took a snap on the field, heard our defense called. Situations happen like that. I was impressed with the way those guys all came in and played.

Dayon, we're going to look at it. We know if something happens, we're not afraid to put him in a football game. I don't want to call him a gamer, but he showed some things that he's not afraid of that scene either. So he helped himself a lot.

Q. How challenging is it to go from one non-conference game into opening conference play this week, but playing 10 conference games over the next 11 weeks?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, I don't know if it really matters. I really don't like opening up with a conference game like we did last year. I think that improvement from week one to week two, just like Syracuse is going to get better, bet your life they will. Really doesn't bother me.

I think getting that first one under your belt, we usually have one game that maybe is a little easier than the rest of them. Every year it seems like it's a bear. It doesn't

matter.

As a matter of fact I'd rather play the best. It's harder to get them ready for Austin Peay, Youngstown State, Delaware and Albany, but it won't be hard to get them ready for Syracuse, Clemson, North Carolina, whoever else we get to play. Kind of a benefit. We don't have to worry about them being mentally ready to go.

Q. Of those five runningbacks, who caught your eye the most?

PAT NARDUZZI: They all did some good things. Vince Davis was a guy that made people miss. It seemed like, I'll take the words out of Coach Powell's mouth, when we blocked for seven, we got seven. Blocked for eight, we get eight. Block for three, you get three. You'd like to block for three and get eight. You'd like to block for eight and get 28. People have a chance to get in there, make something happen.

There were blocks being made. They're not going to be held forever. As we used to talk in the old days, a good runningback is BYOB: be your own blocker. You got to make people miss. That was one thing I saw Vince do, which we saw him do it last year. He's a good back.

Q. Whether or not he'll play on Saturday, how eager is Rashad to get back on the field?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think anybody that's not playing, whether it's an injury or some other reason, they're all eager to come back. You just got to wait your time. They all know what has to go. They know the process. Everybody's eager. Got to do what you got to do.

Q. You talked on Saturday that that's how you wanted an opener to look like, where you wanted to be. What are you looking for this week from your guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: We're looking for them to get better. They're going to play a very talented, fast Syracuse football team. They better come out ready to play.

I'm looking for improvement. We talk about it in practice every day. I told them they better be 3% better watching the tape. Oh, I see where I messed up. They got 3% better in a meeting yesterday. We got to be 3% better tomorrow when we step on the field.

I hope some of them are sitting around here as I walk around the facility, in the linebacker room, O-line room, quarterback room watching tape. Hopefully Damar walks in the defensive staff room saying, What do I watch? He's sitting in the defensive staff room right now eating lunch

and watching videotape. He's like a videotape guru. He's the captain now.

We're at pregame meal, dinner Friday night. Damar is sitting there with his iPad. What are you doing? Watching tape, coach. It's dinnertime. What are you going to do? Mess with his mojo? He's in there watching tape again.

We're getting 3% better every day. When we put our pads on tomorrow morning, we have to get 3% better. We have to know what our mistakes were, fix them, fundamentally and structurally.

Q. You mentioned Cisco in your opening. How hard is he for a quarterback to keep track of? What makes him so good, especially when the ball is in the air?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's kind of like Paris Ford. He finds the ball. Got great eyes. He'll play all over the place. He'll have a good beat on what we do. We'll have to change up what we do, try to stay away from him. He's just a great football player.

Again, he didn't do that in one game. He proved that over his career there. He'll be a player that plays at the next level.

Q. For the players that are dealing with quarantine, testing to get back clear, I presume they're in Zoom meetings. What have you seen from the guys who had to go through that, how they're tackling that challenge? Has to be frustrating for young guys.

PAT NARDUZZI: I haven't had really many conversations with them on Zoom. It's the protocol we have to go through with them. They'll sit on Zoom meetings, whether it's on the iPad when we're in the facility as we're socially distanced. They're with their position coaches. They don't want to miss a beat. They're happy to be on a Zoom call. Let's put it that way. That's all they get. You get stripped of everything. You're in isolation, you're locked down. You got your cell phone, your iPad, you got a bed.

We ask them to sit up, put their picture on. Some of these guys don't have their pictures on today. Bostick, Casey. Bostick has a fake picture up there. Probably pretending, taking a nap. There comes Seth, there is Bostick, took his stuff out. LaSalle is in there now, too.

Q. Into Heinz Field first time. When the game was on, everybody is focused on the field. The general atmosphere that will be this way for the season, playing with no fans in the stands. What was that experience like?

PAT NARDUZZI: Coming out of the tunnel was a little bit different. I was waiting for the lane where the band would be, the cheerleaders, dance team, kind of carve out there. Actually I asked the guys, You want to go towards the 50 or straight shot? I think they wanted to take the shortcut to the sideline.

But once the game got started, it was normal. We had some crowd noise. But we're focused on the game. I think our kids were good. One of the keys to victory, I said before the game, was to create our own energy. We are the energy. I say that every week. Doesn't matter whether you're on the road or at home, we got to always create our own energy.

I think there's some guys out there that will be contagious. Paris Ford, always so energetic. If the offense or defense does something big, we want to get everybody like Paris. He's that energy that is contagious. We want everybody to catch that.

Q. You didn't come out of the locker room until after the national anthem. Was that a team decision, your decision?

PAT NARDUZZI: We talked about it as a leadership council. There's no fans out there. I don't even think they're going to play a national anthem. There's nobody there. Are we going to go out there? Just kind of a team deal. Kind of common sense that there was nothing to do out there.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

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