

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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## Coach Pat Narduzzi

### Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Good morning. I guess it's a little bit early. But the sun came up this morning and we're still alive here after a tough really 24 hours. We put the chapter to sleep last night as a team, watched the tape, looked at all the mistakes that we made and made our corrections.

I think anytime you have a loss like that, you have to learn from it, and I think our kids will learn. In my 30 years of coaching or whatever it's been, I don't know if I've seen a team as maturely take that. I think I mentioned after the game in the locker room it was really quiet. I think last night, I don't know if I've been in a team meeting where they were as quiet as I've seen, which tells me it hurts like a coach, and I think that's what you want as a coach.

For years and years and years, okay, you'd jump on a bus on an away trip and you'd hear some clowning around going on in the back of the bus. And as a coach, man, we have no life. This is our life, and as players they've got -- their girlfriend texts them, someone tweeted this or that and they go back to normal life.

But really I think it hit our kids in the stomach like, what just happened today, and sometimes you need a wake-up call to find out really what's real, what's fake, who do you listen to. I think sometimes you listen to the outside noise and it can affect you.

But I think our guys learned. Like I said, quietest meeting I've been in, focused, locked in, so I like where we are after that loss. If a loss can be good for you, I think it's going to be good for us. We'll see how we respond. I think that's going to be the key this week in practice, and from our history, we always respond, and that's what I expect.

I think we've got great senior leadership. And we left a lot of plays on the field on both sides of the ball. I thought special teams played really probably good enough to win when you look at the punting of Christodoulou, the field goal kicking out of Kessman. There was a lot of bright spots and a lot of young guys playing on special teams, as well, guys like Rashad Battle that I've praised. There was



good on both sides of the ball.

We didn't start well on defense and we didn't finish well. In between we were pretty darned good. Offensively our pass protection was pretty good. We turned one guy loose and got Kenny hit with a targeting call. But the protection was solid.

Saturday after the game what the protection looked like, obviously there's little mistakes here and there that we can correct, but one glaring one was when we missed a run-through, and again, that's something we'll continue to clean up and not let Kenny get hit like he got hit on that one because we never want to see our quarterback take a hit, plus a targeting. That'll be on every official's targeting tape for the next couple years, I guess.

Looking forward to the challenge of a good Boston College football team. Jeff Hafley, I've known Jeff for a while, I know he's a former Pitt coach along with Frank Cignetti, two guys with Pittsburgh ties, so it'll be personal to them. It'll be personal for us.

Again, Jeff has got that team really on all three phases playing tough. Those defensive guys stick together, but it's a tough, physical, well-coached football team on both sides and on special teams. That's what you see out of them. They're a good football team. They took North Carolina to the end. They fight back and beat a Texas State football team and really that's the last two weeks, but really good football team.

Obviously on offense Cignetti runs it, I guess. Obviously got a ton of experience as an offensive coordinator. Phil Jurkovec is the guy throwing the ball. They are a lot more pass-oriented. They really want to throw the ball. It seems like with Phil and his arm he's got a lot of confidence in his arm. They're heavier pass, so we'll have to tighten up our coverage a lot more from what it looked like last week. We'll have to play a lot better at the No. 1 receiver because we got pushed off last week, so we're going to have to fight into that and we'll coach the heck out of that this week. That's happened a few years back with Virginia Tech, and they came in on a Thursday night and we saw it.

We'll probably see a lot more push-off, catch the ball the rest of the season, so we'll coach it and get better at that and throw that on the coach's plate as far as things we



could have done better as we always, as coaches, take a lot of the blame as far as what happens in a game in any respect.

Really good offense. I mean, they're -- Zay Flowers is a wideout that's really good. Their tailbacks are great. Tight end, No. 80, Hunter, is an exceptional player. He's got like 48 targets on the year in three games, Hunter Long, that is. But I mean, he's talented. He's as good a tight end as you're going to see; he'll be playing on Sundays and be a first- or second-round pick I'm guessing based on the way he runs and makes plays.

I think that's about it. Defensively they're tough. Isaiah McDuffie, one of the linebackers, really stands out to you; Max Richardson, as well, two inside linebackers that make a lot of plays, pressure off the edge. They're well-coached. Questions?

**Q. This is a very different team than it was a year ago. Head coach, quarterback. Are there similarities now, things they do the same?**

PAT NARDUZZI: There's a lot of similarities. They run a lot of the same kind of run concepts. They like to -- they run a pro play called the push play where they're trying to get double teams and just really knock you back and see if they can just push the line of scrimmage. But it appears that they just kind of run the ball just to say they ran it, but they really want to throw the football. Like I said, we're going to be really good in our pass defense. Structurally we'll have to change a few things just to make sure that we secure our passing game.

**Q. How about your run game? What have you been able to notice in film study, and what's been missing in that regard?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, we've been playing three-down football teams for the last couple weeks so we'll go to four-down with Boston College. We just didn't get much movement up front. What's the reason? I don't know, but I think our O-line played average or below average. We outrushed them. It's some funny things you look at, North Carolina State is either first or second in the ACC in rushing average in 220 yards per game, and they get whatever yards they got, but we outrushed them, so we can talk about run games. We weren't second in the ACC a week ago, but there's some good things going on, but we've just got to finish, and again, give those other guys some credit. They had a good scheme. They've got a nose tackle that's 245 pounds probably, and we just played average up front. So if we keep playing average, we won't run the ball very well, but it all starts up front on the O-line and the D-line. If you're going to stop the run and run the

well you'd better win up front and we've got to get more movement. We were on the right people most of the time, but you've got to move them off the line of scrimmage.

**Q. I guess you were 17 games into the Mark Whipple era here. What do you think this offense's identity is kind of through almost a season and a half now?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I evaluate it game-by-game. The identity is we scored 29 points, which I hope is enough to win a football game. If I don't go -- blame me, if I don't go for it on 4th and 1 and I kick a field goal down there, maybe we win the game. Who knows how that changes the game but I felt like we should be able to get it in. We've got four plays from the 1. Maybe a stubborn head coach, but if I didn't go for it on 4th and 1 you guys would be yelling at me because I didn't go for it on 4th and 1 down there, so either way you lose. But we expect to score touchdowns.

I'm happy with the way Kenny is playing. Kenny played an outstanding game, guys, and played well enough to win, like our special teams did. He threw the ball well, maybe his best game this year so far. The pass protection was great by the O-line, as well. We pass protected pretty darned well. Kenny threw it well and receivers caught the ball most of the time.

But we're not perfect, nor are those guys on Sunday yesterday as I see dropped balls as I walk in and out of my office.

You know, it's about winning football games. Our job on offense is to score more points than the opponent, and we've done that a good part of the time and there's some times we don't. But that's like everybody in the country; it's a team game. We've got to play good in all three phases. I can tell you that. There's no finger pointing over here. You guys can point fingers all you want, but we don't point fingers over here. This is the guy right here; you guys can point it at me.

**Q. You mentioned at the beginning that the team was quiet as late as last night's team meeting, and you said that's a good sign. Why do you think that's a good sign?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Because I know how I feel, okay. I know how I feel, and you get pissed off. You're pissed at what happened. Like I said, I get mad when they don't get mad, when they're laughing and giggling. I'm like, how important is it to you. So to me it's important to those guys. Again, I talk about our senior leadership, talk about our captains. It was serious.

Now again, then they go to eat afterwards, but just locked into business. It's a good thing because they care, and if they don't care and if they're all clowning around and laughing and giggling -- I've walked in team meetings after you get beat by 20 and the guys are all laughing. Like, do you know what happened less than 24 hours ago? But that's the age we're in, and kids get -- they let it go quickly. Adults don't because like I said, it's our life. It's what we love to do, it's what our passion is to go out there and coach and win. We all want to win. Our kids want to win.

But if you don't win, it's like, oh, okay, let's go move on to the next thing, what are we going to win tonight. But they were locked in. I think they understand how much sacrifices they've made this year with the pandemic oriented, and it's like, man, we're doing all this, we can't go out and play like that. It comes down to having your mind right, and I obviously didn't do a great job of getting them mentally prepared to come in and play that football game. For whatever it is, sometimes you have to learn by the fire there, and I think that's really what happened.

**Q. You mentioned talking to the captains and the veterans. Do you talk to them every Sunday? And did you talk to them before the team meeting? How did that conversation go?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I talk to them usually Monday, and we'll text back and forth in groups or whatever. So it's not -- I don't have a captains' meeting where I bring them in, but I always want to feel what they think, what they hear, what they -- just the feel of the team. We've got good leadership.

**Q. After watching the tape, what did you think of your pass rush, and how come it wasn't quite as effective as it was the first three games?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, probably because we were a little bit undisciplined early. We did a poor job. Like I said, it starts with me, of just preparing our kids for the double-clap cadence and all that. We hadn't seen a lot of it going in, and we did a poor, poor job of -- we'll never let it happen again. Clap or not, hard cadence or not, we've got to work it every week. But our kids have been so used to taking off and going, they slowed us down. I think that's one of the things is 17 play drives slowed us down, too many critical errors as far as just pre-snap penalties. That slowed us down. They got the ball out quick.

I told you Leary is a good football player, good quarterback. I knew he was the best quarterback -- I knew early in the week that was going to be the guy that was that man, and he played really well. He's a good quarterback. North Carolina State is going to win a lot of

football games this year because of him.

**Q. Have you had any trepidation about using Kenny so much in short-yardage situations the way you did just from his health standpoint? Or is that something you've kind of always been okay with, just haven't done as much as you did Saturday?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You're talking short yardage, you're talking quarterback sneaks?

**Q. Yeah.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Kenny wants the ball. He wanted it earlier. Kenny wants the ball all the time. As a matter of fact, Kenny pulled a couple zone reads that he's not supposed to thinking, hey, I'm going to go make the play. If you guys aren't going to make a play I'm going to make a play, and that's wrong. Those are the little things, the details that he's just got to read and not just say, hey, I'm going to be the guy, I'm going to be the hero. He made more mistakes really in the run game as far as pulling it a couple times when he shouldn't have.

But Kenny is a tough guy. You want the ball in No. 8's hands. Like I said, he played a heck of a ballgame, and we have no regrets. Kenny is tough. Obviously you worry about the cheap shots that he's taken, which we had a late hit on a quarterback but it was one step. I don't even know how to coach that because I -- I don't see it the same way. But that was a different penalty there.

**Q. Does Phil Jurkovec play the way you expected him to play when you watched him in high school?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No question about it. He's got a quick release. He's got a strong arm, he's confident like he was in high school. He likes to take off running. If it's not there, he's taking off and you've got to use those legs. He's a hard guy to get down. We've got to stress that he's not going to just be dragged down to the ground. He bumps people off of them, he shakes them. He does not feel like he's going down, so if we're going to get to him we've got to get to him and we've got to get all of him down on the on the ground, so we'll be live on the quarterback this week and we've got to get two hands on him. He's not going down with one hand, that's for sure. But he's exactly what you thought.

They've done -- Cignetti has done an outstanding job with him. He's confident, he's getting the ball out. They're not giving up sacks. He's throwing the ball and he looks really, really good. He's a good football player. He's just as good or better than what we faced last week as a quarterback, and I thought Leary was really good.

**Q. On that, obviously you guys have a lot of local guys on the defense. Is it different or more exciting or anything playing a quarterback that's also from the area that they're probably familiar with?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, they're familiar. You'd have to ask Damar and some of the other guys that may have played against him in high school, but that doesn't matter to me. It's like there's 11 guys out there, we've got 11 guys. We've got more Pittsburgh guys. We've got them outnumbered Pittsburgh guys, I guess, but that's not going to be a factor in winning or losing. I think it makes it interesting for our kids, but I haven't said, hey, Damar, are you looking forward to playing Phil? It doesn't matter. There's no marriage there.

**Q. Jimmy said after the game that some of the success they had in the fourth quarter running the ball that you guys had was partially because you guys -- the passing offense backed off NC State. Do you foresee you guys using the pass to set up the run more in the near future, or was that more of a mid-game adjustment that won't have as much impact on your future game plans?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, again, if we're not running the ball well then you're going to go to the pass and you're going to throw it, which will then set up your run game. Either one of them could set it up. Last year our pass game set up our run game.

You talk about the hot hand at tailback, it's also how's our O-line playing, and if they're not knocking them off the ball and there's nothing to go to, then we're going to go to what's working. I want 1st downs and I want touchdowns. I don't care; run it, pass it, let's get in the end zone and let's see if we can make something happen.

**Q. You mentioned coaching up the corners and the coverage better. What is the challenge of trying to figure out what you can and can't do and how do you try to relay that to your players?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I have no idea. You know, I'm confused there on how to -- it's hard to play defense if they aren't going to call things both ways, and I can't answer that question. We've just got to coach it better. We're just going to have to lean on them and we're going to man turn on them instead of zone turning. We've just got to do a better job physically, and we're capable of doing it. We've done it before and we'll have to just go back to it again because if it's going to be that way, then it's got to be that way.

**Q. You guys kind of had a convenient start to the season with four straight home games. Obviously now the final seven games, five of them will be on the road, only one bye week in there. I guess how prepared do you think this team is just for that kind of stretch run where you go on the road five times out of seven?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Hey, you know, that's what it is. I think our kids enjoy going on the road, going into a different atmosphere. I think we're going to go to another quiet stadium so that will be no change for us. Not like we're going to have to deal with any crowd noise. But the field is about the same size. Might have a little bit more extra sideline room, more space or not, but it's playing the game of football and there's 22 guys out on there. It doesn't really matter.

I think the biggest challenge when you talk about traveling is just traveling with the virus that's going on. I mentioned this way back in the summer as far as two-hour flights and wearing your mask the entire time on the plane. Chancellor said something today in a head coaches' meeting that we had that I thought, wow, that was really good. Only a chancellor could think about. He's like, it took us like 50 years to learn how to wear a seatbelt. It took four to whoever came up with -- GM, if you don't put your seatbelt on it's going to beep and annoy you until you put it on. We need some of those on your masks. If you've got your mask hanging or on your chin, you need some beeping device to make sure you put that thing up because that's about the best thing you can have. I thought that was interesting. It took everybody on this Zoom call to figure out maybe I should wear a seatbelt, and it's the same thing with these masks. We've got to wear our masks for two hours on a flight and there's talk of not even eating on the flight, just -- you want to leave that thing up. I mean, we're around different people. We've stayed in our bubble. I know our kids are out on campus, but I don't know if the stewardesses are getting tests. I don't know how all that thing works, but one of my philosophies has been the last few weeks, and we've been really darned good, is to pretend like everybody has got COVID-19 and protect yourself, and that's going to be the biggest challenge.

It's the same thing at a hotel. Different hotel, who lives in that hotel. I think they're in the red up there. What are we, in the green right now in Pittsburgh? I think they're in the red in Boston. So we're going into a place that I want to make sure we come out of nice and clean, too, because it's about the safety of our football team.

**Q. I think you mentioned week one that Austin Peay was being tested in the hangar at Pittsburgh airport when they came in. Will you guys be tested at the**

**Boston airport? How has that been explained to you?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, it'll be wherever, whatever is most convenient for us. It'll be whatever is most convenient for MAKO, and by the way, MAKO has done an incredible job of just -- I was stressed out early in the year, and they have eliminated a lot of stresses. The results are coming back, whether it's a Sunday test, a Wednesday test or a Friday test to the point where you're not every day on edge. I'm talking back in the camp it was like seven days a week you were like -- you couldn't ever catch a breath. But MAKO has been incredible as far as how they operate, the diligence that they get our results back and the quality of that company. So I couldn't say more things about him and that company.

The place where we'll get tested I think this weekend will be right here in our facility like we've been, so we'll get them done in the morning and then they'll get them down to Carolina, where MAKO is located, and then by the time we get up there we should have some type of results I guess that evening sometime.

**Q. Are you guys using MAKO for all three weekly tests now?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. Yes, we are.

**Q. You talked about the tight end Long right off the top. What do you need to fix or improve after giving up two touchdowns to the tight end last week?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Play better coverage, get our hands on people, have better focus, better leverage, better eye control. But it comes down to eye control. Again, we were loose in coverage. We just didn't play our football game.

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