

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

Monday, November 2, 2020

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: First of all, sorry I'm a few minutes here late. Obviously we practiced today, which is unusual circumstance for us practicing on a Monday, but we obviously gave our kids the opportunity to have the day off tomorrow because obviously it's an important day across this country for our kids to go out and vote.

So we will not practice tomorrow, and our kids, I would say 50 percent of them, have already voted. We've got them all registered. Maybe you've heard throughout the time, really back in the summer had them registered to vote back home and get that taken care of.

So we really stressed that really in the last couple months to make sure their voices are heard.

Next, I think EJ must have insider information because I think last Thursday, I kind of mentioned it last Friday, like EJ emailed me late and I said, Hey, what do you think about doing a, you know, just a mini-presser I guess on Friday just to close the chapter on the Notre Dame game, so he must have wanted to make sure we had enough length here today.

As you guys know already, Paris Ford has decided to move on to the next chapter of his life. Paris is a tremendous football player, a tremendous person, a guy that got a lot of respect for and we appreciate all the efforts he's put in here in his really three and a half, four years and really for the six years we've known him through the whole recruiting process.

We wish him all the best in his endeavors as he moves on through this football world and the rest of his life.

So that's on Paris, that's on voting, and then obviously Florida State, which is really where my main focus is right now. Obviously replacing Paris Ford in the lineup and a guy that we've got a ton of confidence in. I think I might have mentioned a week or two weeks ago we feel like he's a starter. I think Brandon Hill is a guy that has played the last couple weeks, has played special teams. He's a playmaker. He's physical, he's strong, and he'll be the guy



that will line up and play in that position as we sit here today.

And, again, I think we've got a very, very talented football team in Florida State coming in. When you look at it, Mike Norvell is a heck of a football coach, in his first year, so he's been busy just trying to install his offense, his defense there at Florida State, and probably had one of the toughest jobs going in, like any coach that comes in with a whole new staff, a new coordinator on offense and defense, without spring ball.

What you see out of Florida State is a constant improvement every single week. Without having spring ball and maybe abbreviated camp, I don't know what you call it that we had in this 2020 period, so I don't know how their practices were compared to ours, but they've gone through four quarterbacks on offense in Rodemaker, Purdy -- what was the big number 1? Blackman. But now they've found their guy, I think.

Jordan Travis, No. 13, is a football player. I really, really like that guy. He's the key to their offense. They like to run it. He'll throw the RPOs. We'll see the tee shoots. They like to copycat what they see on tape, so we've worked a ton of different stuff that we've seen through the years, anything that's hurt us. Actually the last three years we've worked on just looking at -- we've had two weeks to prepare for them, and I'm sure we'll see stuff that we didn't know we'd see.

But they found their quarterback in Travis. They're talented in the backfield. They got three tailbacks that play a ton for them. They don't have quite as many starts on that offensive line as the last team we faced. And then on defense, Marvin Wilson, starts with him, an All-American up front. Their front four is an ACC front four.

When I first got in the ACC a few years ago I thought it was a quarterback conference. This year I feel like it's a D-line conference, especially with Notre Dame being in it. It's a talented crew.

I think it's better -- they obviously had a big upset win over North Carolina on their schedule and they had a little conference and obviously got stumbled by Louisville. They come into our game with an open week, as well, so they've got time to study and figure out what they want to do as



well as we do.

With that, that was long, and I'll open it up for questions.

Q. In your conversations with Paris, what were his main reasons for not finishing the season with his teammates?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I think everybody has got decisions to make. All along, Paris has had these thoughts in his mind going back to last year in February when he decided to stay, and then there's all the opting out going on in the middle of summer during camp. So he took a few days back then to think about it long and hard.

You know, I can't fully answer that. Those are decisions him and his family have got to make. They're business decisions, they're family decisions, and one that we respect. Just stuff that he's got to do.

Q. Did he come to you over the off week or even before that to let you guys know of that decision? How did that kind of happen there?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, we've had conversations last week. We had conversations this week, as early as this morning was our last conversation, and one yesterday. There's been conversations, yeah. There's always conversations.

Q. Is there any concern that just simply because the results haven't been there as a team that that influenced his decision? And as a coach do you worry about that, if things sort of don't go your way that more kids are going to be like, I'm good?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think everybody has got decisions to make. I don't see that as an issue. I think we're good there. I mean, I don't see it as an issue.

Q. You don't expect any other players to opt out here?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, I don't. I don't at all. I don't see that. But, you know, I don't have a crystal ball and you never know. But I don't see that right now, no.

Q. You mentioned Brandon and what he does well. What's the opportunity do you think here for him, especially with this being a free year, if you will?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, it's a next man in. It's an opportunity for that guy to take it over and be the future safety at that spot, and I really think you guys will be impressed with what you see back there out of him. I think he's a fantastic football player. He's athletic, he's tough,

he's physical, and he flies around with a ton of effort.

It's next man up. It's a great opportunity for him, and that's really what my focus goes to, is obviously to Florida State like we did in practice today and focus on what we can control and the guys that are in those meeting rooms and on that football field.

Q. How have you seen the team react to Paris' news?

PAT NARDUZZI: There really hasn't been a whole lot of talk. Maybe they have talked by themselves, but I'm focused on Florida State and I think our football team is.

Went out and had a nice practice today, and that's where the focus is. So if you guys have any more questions, let's try to focus on Florida State. How about that?

Q. One of the things Paris brought to your team, he was an energy guy, a lot of enthusiasm all the time. How do you try to keep that up, not just losing him but you lost four games in a row, and do you think that is a concern for your team right now?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, it's not a concern for me right now. I think our kids are excited to go down to Florida State and play a really good football team.

He does have energy, but we've got other guys with energy, and I think offense and defense feed off each other. We need to feed off each other better.

Last week we talked about celebrating more, period, and prior to even knowing anything about what's happening today really. We've got other energy guys. It's not one guy that has energy and everybody else is a bunch of zombies out there.

Q. Any update on Kenny today?

PAT NARDUZZI: No. I wish I could tell you. I wish I could say that he's good to go. I think he gets better every week. We'll just keep working at it.

Q. You mentioned on Friday that Joey Allen took most of the snaps last week in your two practices. Is that still the case this week?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, he's still taking the majority. Kenny can go out and throw but he's not moving great obviously, but he's out there watching at least this week.

Q. They say insanity -- the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. With your running game, what are

your options there other than just block the guys better, hit the holes harder, and what can you try to do to try to improve it outside of just running the same --

PAT NARDUZZI: You've got to change it up a little bit, and obviously we like to throw the ball and that's where our strength is at least, is throwing the football. So you've got to work on it. And I guess we'll find out, find out if we make you insane for another Saturday in a row. Hope not.

Q. I'm a little more worried about your sanity than mine at this point, but at some point do you get to the point and say, Hey, look, that's just something we're not good at this year and let's just throw it 78 times and see what happens?

PAT NARDUZZI: No. We ain't doing that. We're going to continue to try, and eventually just keep pounding that rock, pounding that rock. The first hit might not make it, but after that 115th, 200th, 2000th hit on that stone that thing will crack open and we got to continue to push and work to dig through that thing.

Q. Has Izzy given you any indications that he might earn more playing time? He hasn't played much the last three games.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, you know, we'll see. It's a day by day. He's still a puppy, as I like to call him. He's a great kid, and sometimes it just takes a little longer. You still go back to that spring ball, day three. You guys saw the same thing I saw.

Again, it's just a process. You've got to trust the process, whether it's in the run game or having patience with your players, period.

We'll find out. We'll find out on Saturday if Izzy gets a few more carries, and we'll see.

Q. There were some coaches around the country that weren't a fan of election day being a mandatory day off because of COVID tests and practices and these kids have a schedule. What were your thoughts when you found out that the NCAA made that a mandatory off day?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, I think at first the ACC made it mandatory, I believe, and then the NCAA came in and was like, Hey, we think -- I think the ACC did that, so my hat goes off to Commissioner Swofford in making that decision, number one.

I was not real when I first heard about it back in the day because we were scheduled to play Virginia Tech, I

believe, in the first schedule, not the third schedule, and we were scheduled to play Virginia Tech on a Friday, I believe.

EJ, correct me -- or it was a Thursday, whatever it may have been. I think it was a Friday. But there's no day off if you're playing a day early. It's nearly impossible. I talked to Fuente after that saying, How are we going to take a day off? We're going to have to have a gentleman's handshake. We're going into this game with two days of practice, and we would look bad if we did that.

But I think it's a great idea. I think everybody talks about wanting change, wanting to make an impact, and everybody's vote counts. I think it's important for our kids to get out there and don't complain about the results if you don't put your name on that.

I think it's a great idea, and I'm actually so happy because we've got a Saturday game instead of a Friday, so thank the commissioner on that one, as well. So to be able to practice today after a week off, I mean, it kind of timed out for us perfectly. Hated to have an open week after seven games, but we timed it perfectly so we could practice today, give them a day off tomorrow, which for them it's like a normal Monday. They'll come in and watch a little videotape on their own. It's an academic day and then we practice Wednesday and Thursday, so it kind of goes back to that freshness thing.

Again, I don't think we're a fresh team. I see a little bit more speed on our field right now, and I like what I see.

Q. You talked about Brandon Hill. Who's another guy or another couple guys that need to step up with Paris being gone?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, Judson Tallandier has been a guy that -- I'm texting last week after Thursday's practice saying, Jud, you're playing really good. He's coming around. I could pull out his text and show it to you, but he's like, Coach, I've got more confidence than I've ever had, like I'm locked in. Which is good to hear.

So Jud is one of those guys, and Buddy Mack. Buddy Mack is a guy, even last week we put him in there to get some reps and he's got recall. Buddy Mack is another guy that you could possibly see on the field, and obviously you've got Erick Hallett. He's a swing guy. He's probably the most versatile football player on our team because he can play corner, he can play safety, he can play star. He can do it all.

Sometimes I feel bad that we don't get him locked into one home, but he's so good at doing everything, and he's been that Swiss Army knife, I guess.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. Did Paris have any concerns about COVID in your conversations?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, no. We've been really safe, so no. We've been really good. Talk COVID -- don't you let your guard down either, guys. I continually tell our guys, don't let their guard down. You guys watch the news and you see it spiking everywhere around the country.

Again, it's a great thing that the ACC got us started early. Some teams are starting to play this weekend when it's starting to crank up, so we're very, very fortunate to have made it through seven games. Right now we're trying to get to eight, and every day is an important day when it comes to wearing your mask and doing the right thing and knowing who you're around and washing your hands.

Q. For your players, a lot of them, I'm assuming most of them, this is their first time voting in a presidential election. They might have a little more emotional stake in the outcome than normal. Have you guys talked at all about sort of how to handle it? It looks like this thing might drag out for a while. Have you guys talked about go vote and then come back to work on Wednesday and we'll try to -- we'll get inside this bubble and let the rest of the world be the rest of the world?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know, what's the state of Pennsylvania have, nine days to get all the votes counted? Did I hear that? Is that right? Three days now? Three days is a long time. Just found out -- I was in conversation with a couple guys before our meeting started today, just talking small talk, and they're like, Coach, we vote on Tuesday, so Tuesday we'll know.

And I'm like, usually you kind of know, but I said, this year I don't think we're going to know right away. It could be up to a week. I don't know what's going to happen. It's all the unknown. But I think a football player, a football team is used to the adversity. We've been through some adversity, and I guess we'll address that Wednesday morning if we don't know who it is at that point.

I'm guessing if we don't know -- again, we just go out and play football. We do our job. All we can do is go vote and then after that let everything take care of itself. We have enough to worry about; I can tell you that. Florida State being the biggest one right now.

Q. You talked about all the different players you guys have that you're going to be addressing at that secondary. Do you see maybe some different looks or different ideas to experiment with some of the new

guys that you have, because the different skillsets that they might bring and things that you might be able to show in your next couple games?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, you know, some new things in spring. You think about the old -- when you were in chemistry class back in the day and you've got that vial and you pour the wrong stuff and everything explodes on you. I'm going to try not to look for any explosions, try to make sure the chemicals are right. I'm going to do what our guys know how to do. I think it's probably the best advice.

And, again, I've got a lot of faith in Brandon. I don't think we have to -- we've got different change-outs every week, but we've just got to play smart and know what we're doing and be consistent back there.

Q. I don't even know if Coach knows yet about the Steelers' news, about four Ravens testing positive. So with the Steelers being so close, I mean, is there --

PAT NARDUZZI: I should stay away. I text Coach Tomlin back and forth, and congratulations to the Steelers; 7-0 start, that's awesome. He's a tremendous football coach, and they've been safe and we watch, their protocols are just like ours. But that's not good news. That's not good news for -- and again, you look at what we've been going through, and I don't understand what's going on with the NFL.

I think our PCR tests have been really good. I'm happy with our testing, and I did not hear that, so I appreciate you letting me know that, because that's something I'll pass on to our team, again, Wednesday morning when we meet next. It's like, you don't know.

I try to mention it every single day, whether it's in a team meeting or post practice about just being smart and doing the little things right. That's not good what's happening in Baltimore then. Four turns to eight.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports