

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

Monday, November 16, 2020

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

COACH NARDUZZI: I thought we'd be coming in here on a Monday after a win down in Atlanta. Obviously we didn't get to make that trip. And obviously disappointing as we sat there, I guess, last Thursday at noon or 1:00, whatever time we meet on Thursday, and you feel like everything's good. And then you get reports.

And the one thing I'll say is I think people take it for granted out there like how impressive our kids have been for eight weeks, nine weeks, really with an open week. I said earlier, it's like I'm talking to myself sometimes. It's kind of like move on to the next question. But our kids did an incredible job for nine weeks, including that open week, of really having nothing at all, no issues.

And then when you least expect it, and you think you're all good -- and I talked to our guys all the time about keep your guard up. Don't let your guard down. Just pretend that everybody's got it out there. When you look at the numbers in Allegheny County, with COVID right now, the numbers just keep going up. It was in the five hundreds yesterday, keep an eye on it.

The more people out there that have it the more chance you have as you're moving around this city of getting it, whether it's a doorknob, whether it's a counter at McDonald's. You don't know where it's going to be or in Tallahassee somewhere. Crazy thing is you don't know where it came from.

But we've been clean up until last week. And it's obviously disappointing. I feel bad for Georgia Tech as well. And obviously us, our kids. We worked so hard. And nobody tries to get it on purpose, but sometimes it creeps up and gets you. And it got us last week. And we're working hard on it. It's serious. This is a serious deal.

Like I said, I feel bad for our kids. Our kids are disappointed. I guess whatever it was, was it Thursday afternoon, I guess?

So we move on to the next. Obviously Georgia Tech was not canceled, it was postponed to December. And then



we'll work on Virginia Tech, great football team again. I think their seventh in the country in rushing offense, number one in the ACC probably. Hendon Hooker is running the show there for them. Played against them a year ago.

They know how to the run the football. They're good at it. They're good at scheming you up.

And defensively their front four is, get another ACC front four that our offensive line will have to handle. And that's kind of with the new coordinator, obviously Bud Foster is not here. So that will be different than what we saw last year.

We ran into a buzz saw down in a storm down in Virginia Tech last year. So be a little different defense that we'll have to deal with this year. First time, what are they going to do to us? We'll have to find out there.

Their front four is really good. And Hendon Hooker and Khalil Herbert, their tailback, No. 21, as well as Tre Turner, their wideout, No. 11, goes up gets the ball, their leading receiver.

Q. Based on the number of absences you were anticipating for the Georgia Tech game -- and maybe you can tell us how many that was -- could you have played the game, physically played the game with those absences?

COACH NARDUZZI: I'm not going to get into numbers. I don't make those decisions. Our chief medical officers make that decision, as far as whether you could or couldn't.

I can tell you this: The numbers weren't so bad that we probably couldn't have played it. Okay. If we've got 22 we can play. We weren't down to 21, I can tell you that.

But to me it doesn't come down to whether -- gosh, do we have 33, we could have played it, whatever. In the ACC we don't have a number put on that thing because I don't think you can put a number on our student-athletes. I think that's a bad, bad deal when you start putting, well, if we have this many we can go.

Since the beginning, I've told our kids, I'm going to fight for them. In July and August it was about their safety and



taking care of them -- not taking care of me, taking care of them and making sure they're safe.

The one thing I would say is I think it's a lot different when you're home than when you're playing on the road. When you've got to go on the road, if you're unsure what's on that airplane, and we travel two hours on the airplane, which I told you I complained earlier in the year about how come Pitt has all these road games, and do we have a problem going down to Tallahassee? Was there a stewardess or bus driver? Who knows what happened, I don't know. That's the crazy thing with this whole deal, you don't know.

But do we put our kids at risk on another airplane for two hours on new buses, in a new hotel, waiting all day in a hotel, so many things that you look at. But we just jeopardize the next week and next week, and we jeopardize our football team and our the kids. And I'm not going to that for them or the parents, if that makes sense. Again, it's the chief medical people making those decisions obviously, but that's how I feel at heart as well.

Q. What's your practice situation? Are you able to practice and have healthy guys out there? Is there a concern about that affecting your preparation if you are even somehow able to play on Saturday?

COACH NARDUZZI: We'll find out later this afternoon, I hope. I don't think I'll tweet anything out. But our hopes is that we tested on Sunday, which was yesterday around 1:00, 2:00. And all our kids are going through that process right now.

We have no results from our Sunday test. We will find out where we are. I think that's important. If we get bad news in those tests, which (knocking on wood) I hope we don't, I pray we don't, we've told our kids we plan on practicing Tuesday and so forth.

But it all comes down to what happens on our Sunday tests as it does every week and then our Wednesday test and Friday test. But the best thing is that we don't have to travel this week, so we're not really putting our kids on an airplane for two hours.

Q. Do you expect to play against Virginia Tech this Saturday? But at the same time I guess you don't really know without those test results back, right?

COACH NARDUZZI: You don't know. You don't know until really Friday at midnight or Saturday morning when you wake up you get your text message that says, hey, everything's good. And again it's been that -- we've gotten used to it. We've gotten spoiled that the results have been great.

So we expect to play Virginia Tech this weekend. That's the expectations. Our kids were miserable this weekend. I was miserable sitting at home watching everybody else play. You prepare to play football games.

Our kids put all the work in. It's like putting all the work in, you study your tail off for that English exam. All of a sudden the teacher at the last second, we're not having that. You're, like, wait a second. I did all that stuff for nothing?

That's kind of where we are. We expect to play the Virginia Tech game. We hope we're not let down again. It will be up to our team and players on how safe they are out there. And we talk constantly about wearing a mask, staying socially distanced and pretend everybody has got it. Everybody on your team has got it, and everybody in Oakland has got it. Everywhere you go you've got to be right here and wash your hands and be more accountable for that.

Q. Wanted to ask about Virginia Tech's running game, specifically you mentioned it in the opening. When you look at them, is that a product of how good Hooker and Herbert are? What do you see from the offensive line? What's made it so effective?

COACH NARDUZZI: Again, it's not just a quarterback, as you know, it's not just a running back or offensive line. It takes 11 guys. Takes receivers blocking down the field to be explosive. But I might say this offensive line is the second best O line we've faced compared to Notre Dame. When you look at their career starts across the top I'll give it to you.

Christian, their left tackle, has 32 career starts. Lecitus Smith has 22 career starts. Hoffman, their center who transferred from Coastal Carolina, has 20 starts. Nester has 17 starts. And Tenuta has 11 starts. So they've got a ton of starts up front. They've got a lot of experience. They're physical and they're strong, and they know what they're doing.

Add Hendon Hooker as their second leading rusher. Anytime you've got a quarterback who can rush the football, it's the 11th man and that's always a dangerous thing for any defense, period.

Q. We talked to you on Thursday and you seemed upbeat about the Georgia Tech game and then a few hours later the teams activities were paused. How quickly did that happen? How did you find out, and when did you realize you weren't going?

COACH NARDUZZI: Like that, probably a couple hours after that you're hoping to go. I don't know when that release went out that night. But probably around 3:30, 4:00 is when -- again, seems like sometime between probably 3:00 and 4:00 is the time when we get results back. That's about when. Again, I don't remember the exact time. But disappointing.

Q. In that timeframe, what happened? Did you keep kids out? Did they clean the whole facility? What were the steps taken immediately until you guys can get back together again?

COACH NARDUZZI: We deep clean it, I don't know the exacts, but it gets deep cleaned a bunch. But even after that it got deep cleaned. We were slow to go in the locker room make sure we're showering in small groups like we normally do. Our protocol here in our facility we feel is pretty safe. We feel it's pretty clean.

I don't think anything's happening here but you just don't know how a guy gets into your bubble. There's just so many unknowns, but what you look at as a staff is what happened and how do we fix it.

If there's nothing broken we're still looking to fix it. So we've got some other things we're looking at doing just to make sure. But it gets cleaned quite often, probably three, four times a week. We have Billy that goes around, he wipes every doorknob, everything, all day long. This guy's an angel that comes in here. I know there couldn't be a cleaner place.

Q. What's been the reaction of the team?

COACH NARDUZZI: They've been good. They've been great. What are you going to do? Disappointed, obviously. But understanding, I guess, is probably the best way to put it. They understand. They know this thing is real.

We've talked about it. We talk about it every single day. We talk about earning those games. So we didn't earn that one. We didn't earn number nine. And to them it's a loss. You feel like you lost this week. I felt like Saturday I felt like I lost. We lost that game. I've told you we've won a lot of them through the year. And every Saturday when we get to that game, it's a win.

It's a win to get there. And we lost this one. We didn't get there. That's disappointing. I didn't want to let Georgia Tech down. Obviously they had some issues as well. Again there's a lot of teams around the country that are having issues, NFL and college. But that's what it is.

Q. A lot of these postponements or cancellations have

come as a result of certain position groups being affected, not having an offensive line or defensive line or whatever. I know you weren't going to get into the numbers but with your team specifically was it the case one position group was really affected or were they spread out?

COACH NARDUZZI: I don't know. We'll find out Saturday, I guess, we'll find out when we get to Saturday. We'll find out.

Q. How comfortable, how many times could you practice? What's the least amount of times you could practice and feel comfortable playing on Saturday?

COACH NARDUZZI: We can practice once, to be honest with you. But you like to get two in. But the problem is we're going to get these results, today, this afternoon sometime. And if they come out bad, then we probably aren't going to practice on Tuesday and then our next test won't be until Wednesday morning unless we have a new test on, I guess, my days are all messed up, Tuesday.

So, it's really a Sunday, Wednesday, Friday. And do we get a Tuesday? That's all -- I don't know. Maybe we have another Tuesday test. Those are all the unknowns I can't control. I wish I could control some of these things. But it's out of my hands.

Q. Are you at a wiggle room schedule wise, too? If for some reason you couldn't play Saturday there would be no chance to reschedule, correct, just because of the way it looks?

COACH NARDUZZI: I don't know that. Maybe we play on a Wednesday, then play somebody else on a Saturday. We've got three guaranteed games. We'd like to get them in. I know that.

Q. For the players that tested positive, how long will they have to remain isolated from the rest of the team? Is it 10 days or 14? And then I'm assuming they won't be eligible to play against Virginia Tech?

COACH NARDUZZI: Yeah, it depends on when they tested positive or had symptoms. It's 10 days, to answer your question, for anybody that tested positive. And then if it's contact, then it's 14 days for anybody that contacted it. Obviously there's the contacts and then there's the positives and those numbers can add up pretty quickly.

Q. You talked about, after the Notre Dame game, that you guys were really going through it, beat up and the bye week really helped you. How much do you think that maybe I know you said you guys were very

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

disappointed you didn't get to play this weekend. It's now two off weeks where you didn't have to get beat up on Saturday and recover going into the weekend. Do you think that's going to help maybe get some of you guys back a little bit faster? You've got players like Wendell Davis and Keyshon Camp who you said might play last week.

COACH NARDUZZI: Right. Might get some back, but you don't know. You don't know the injury part of it. And you don't know where you'll be on the COVID end of it either. But having an extra week, we'll be fresh. But we had enough -- we needed freshness way back -- that's how bad our luck is, right -- when we're ready to roll, we have a fresh open weekend, we go to Florida State, we need to have another game, too, and play Georgia Tech and we couldn't get in. So, we'll have another fresh week, if you want to call it, because we didn't play on the weekend.

Q. You mentioned the kids are doing good. But how are your seniors holding up? This ostensibly is the last chance to play at Heinz Field or in front of their families. Some of these guys, it might be the end of their careers. Just emotionally how are they holding up and what's your message to them?

COACH NARDUZZI: I think they're doing good. Just stay steady. I think they're great. I talked to every one of them yesterday, personally on the phone. They were all great.

I don't see anything -- this senior class, this football team has never wavered. They understand what we're going through. This is 2020. I don't know how many days left. But I'm counting the days. Must not have been enough people who said "happy new year" on the 1st, because I can't wait until 2021, I can tell you that. I hope it's a different year for this entire country.

Q. Speaking of seniors, Patrick Jones, what has he meant to your team?

COACH NARDUZZI: Oh, man, Patrick Jones. Patrick Jones, he's everything. He's a leader. Obviously he's a captain for us. He's a guy that's going to be playing on Sundays. If you have a chance to watch any Sunday football, he's one of those guys.

He's really become a leader. He's grown so much from his freshman year to his senior year. He's tough. He's athletic. He can rush the passer. He gets some sacks every once in a while, which I know defensive ends love to get those sacks. He is special in every way.

Q. We discussed last week, it wasn't typical year. So how do you handle senior day on Saturday?

COACH NARDUZZI: It's a work in progress. But obviously the parents can't come on the field even though our kids see their parents, just Heinz Field, that's not going to happen. Maybe if we played at a high school stadium somewhere they'd let us have it, but won't happen at Heinz Field.

Somehow we'll have video on the video board. I'm not sure how it's going to work, but we'll try to make it as special as we can for those seniors in 2020. That's what it is. There's nothing else we can do and everybody's in the same position we are across the country.

Q. In a normal season you guys would have final exams in the middle of December after the regular season ends before bowl season. But with the new academic schedule and last week's game postponed, finals week is right when you guys are still preparing for regular-season games. Are you guys preparing at all for the extra sense of stress the players might face academically towards the end of the season?

COACH NARDUZZI: There are some kids who have finals this week, and then next week it's finals week, Clemson week. So we'll try to balance that, and try to get the football work in, get the study hall in. Obviously this weekend spend a lot of time on academics. Just fill time where time is void.

But obviously their academics and studying for those finals, usually there's no practice during finals week. So it is a little bit different this year for sure. And it's worrisome, as you can imagine.

Q. You guys normally have your Sunday meetings in the indoor, socially distanced on Sundays. Did you do a team meeting over Zoom yesterday, and how did that go?

COACH NARDUZZI: We did a Sunday meeting over Zoom. And it wasn't a very long one. Just to give them an update. Obviously they came over here to the facility to get their tests and they -- they were in the building briefly, but we told them, in and out, grab lunch to go. And they were gone. And we had one today as well. So we had a nice special teams Zoom and a team Zoom, offense, defense for probably 45 minutes today.

That was good to get that in, just talk ball, and get our guys thinking about Virginia Tech.

Q. Question about Patrick. You talked about his development. From his freshman year, I remember how excited he was when he was coming there. Talk

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about his development, how he's improved to be the player that he is right now. And then last question, how much are you going to miss him?

COACH NARDUZZI: I'll miss him a ton. I'll end up, start with the end of your question. I'm going to miss Patrick a lot. I'm going to miss all of our seniors, obviously. We spent a lot of time together through these four or five years for all of them. And they're like your sons.

And we're going to miss them all. And Patrick, development-wise, you look at where he was. I don't know if he was a two-star, three-star coming out of high school. But he comes from a great family. Mom and dad are very supportive. Care about him. Has a great home life.

And Patrick, he just kept going. Again, it's all about development. That's what we've done here at Pitt is develop our players. We're not going to recruit a bunch of five- and six- and seven-star guys out there. But we're getting the guys we get that we think have potential and we develop them.

You either have character and you can develop, or you don't have character and you don't develop like you thought. Patrick's one of those guys, if you just -- you know you see where he is every year, he just continues to develop. By coming back for his senior year, not declaring early, he just continues to get better at everything.

And again that's who he is. I think he would have left if he didn't think he could get any better and gone to the NFL back last year, last February. But he feels like I can continue to get better. He's going to continue to get better when he gets to the NFL.

Q. How important is this last stretch? Seems like you look at the conference-wide, Clemson, Notre Dame, Miami have kind of separated themselves, UTech (phonetic), North Carolina. There's a big group there in the middle. How important is it to try to get these games in maybe get you guys sort of be able to separate yourselves at least from that group in the middle there?

COACH NARDUZZI: I want to be separated from the group, but each game is a one-game season. We want to win each one of them. Again, it's called pride. I've got pride in our work and who our kids are and what this program represents. So to me it comes down to pride. And I just want to keep going where we are.

Doesn't matter what happened in the past. Doesn't matter. Over time, one-point losses, backup quarterbacks, all that, it doesn't matter. We're focused on these last three games

here to go and want to win all three of them and that will make our season. That's the last thing you'll remember is how we finish the season.

Q. What do you think in terms of Kenny Pickett? We talked about Patrick Jones' NFL prospects, the way that Kenny has kind of grown really over the last season and a half, season-half-plus here?

COACH NARDUZZI: Kenny is an NFL quarterback. I've said that prior to the season. I'll say it again now. I don't think there's an NFL GM, head football coach or scout that doesn't love that guy's toughness that he displays. He's got an arm. The one thing the kids have been lucky, we've had scouts at games, they've been able to watch live, able to watch them compete at a high level.

And Kenny's an outstanding quarterback that is going to fit someone's system really well and they're going to love how he's been coached and taught, the run game and pass game.

Q. You do expect to get some of these seniors honored on Saturday, you do expect to get some of them back next year, don't you?

COACH NARDUZZI: Some of them. We don't know who. I guess we'll find out who we tried out there on the field on Saturday for senior day and we'll kind of go from there.

But being it was an extra year, people have lofty goals on what they want to do. Just like Patrick Jones coming back, these kids have decisions to make, these young men have decisions to make.

Patrick Jones made a great decision on coming back, I think. And I think he believes that as well. Again, it's just a lesson for everyone: Can you get better? If you can get better and improve your stock as a football player, if you want to play at the next level, then why would you do anything else?

It's a tough league to break into.

Q. Real quick about the seniors, will they have to let you know if they want to be recognized and honored? Or how will that part of the equation work, since it is such a different setup this year?

COACH NARDUZZI: Yeah, it's different. But no different than in the years past. I think some guys will make a decision before senior day next, saying I don't need to go through senior day, I'm coming back. And some guys will go through senior day and be gone. I think some will go through senior day and still be debating what's going to

happen after these three games are over.

Do I raise my stock? Do I feel good coming out? What are their people, families talking about? You won't know by what happens on senior day, for sure, because anybody can still say, hey, I don't want to go through senior day, I'm staying and then three weeks say I'm leaving.

So it really -- until they declare whatever that date is, whatever month that is -- I don't know if it changes, I don't know about the combine, I don't know a lot of things -- but everybody has decisions to make. They have time.

Right now, just for senior day, hey, what do you want to do? And then they still have to make decisions after that's all said and done.

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