

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Pat Narduzzi Press Conference



Pitt 47, Virginia Tech 14

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, that football team we've got in the locker room, I think we traveled 69, which is below what we would normally take to a football game. Obviously we got hit with COVID coming back from Tallahassee somehow, some way. I don't know what happened. But I couldn't be prouder of this football team.

You know, you look at what we did this week in practice, and our coaches did a heck of a job. Happy for our seniors. Senior day, that's how you let your seniors go out. Those 10 that walked and had senior day today, I just couldn't be more proud of those guys and what they did today.

It was a gutsy win by our football team. They never blinked. They didn't worry. They believed.

We talked about stepping up, next man up. You talk about next man up, I mean, we were really down 18 guys today. Eight starters did not play today, and guys stepped up and made plays.

It's 2020; some crazy things happen. AJ Davis had a heck of a ballgame, as well. You wouldn't believe 2020; at 9:00 this morning he had a root canal. I was like, we're going to get him a root canal on game day. That's just the way the season has gone. I told him, hey, you're getting a root canal, we're going to talk about your root canal after this game, after you win and rush for 100 -- he didn't quite get 100, but that's adversity.

You talk about a football team. I just couldn't be happier for every senior and the way the guys played. With that, I'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Talk about the play of your offensive line. You didn't have your normal guys out there and you felt comfortable having Kenny throw it 50 times.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we had a lot of faith in those guys. Three new starters. Jimmy didn't practice all week. I

mean, all week he did not practice. But he came in and played a heck of a ballgame.

Bryce was the only guy to practice all week. Matt Goncalves practiced probably half his snaps at offensive center because we didn't have a backup center, as well. He's never snapped the ball in a game or really in a practice really; I don't think so. We really had Jimmy Morrissey as the No. 1 center with Drexel behind him, and then our third snapper, our emergency guy was Jake Kradel, and we didn't have him, either.

You just look at what Borbely did, the O-line, and again, a heck of a job by our offense and Coach Whipple, just kind of putting it together and piecing it together and having belief in our kids. I even heard a comment during the week, Coach, are you really going to put Kenny Pickett behind that offensive line, okay. And yes, we're going to, and we're going to go out and win.

That's Pitt football.

We've got a big one next week, and we've just got to gather ourselves, be smart tonight and hopefully come back a little bit more loaded than we were this week.

**Q. Your touchdown drives today, 75 yards, 65 yards, 99, 79, 80. The ability to finish off those drives, that's something you really struggled at early in the season, but to be able to finish tonight under these circumstances, what does that kind of say about your offense?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, the offense, again, they came back and did what they need to do. It's called execution. They said all week, it's not about them, it's about us. It's about what we do. It's how we execute. And like I said, three new starters up front. Keldrick Wilson came in, as well. He was like our next guy in this week. It's just an outstanding job.

You know, don't let anybody ever tell you you can't do something. I just love that locker room. I love those players that we get to coach here, and I couldn't be happier for them.

**Q. Given all the COVID absences, how close did you come to not playing today?**



PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, I don't make those calls. We were close all week. The positive thing is we were clean all week, too, so that was really -- we didn't lose anybody this week in practice. It was really the previous week that we were waiting on.

You know, I hope we're out of the woods. I don't know where it came from. I talked about a tent and all that stuff down south. I don't know. But you know, I'm just happy for our football team. I'm happy the guys that stepped up. That next man up, again, that's what it's all about.

**Q. Can you speak to the YAC yards and some of the effort from DJ Turner today?**

PAT NARDUZZI: He was phenomenal. We didn't have Jordan Addison, and he took over that slot position, which I think the last time he did it we should have beat North Carolina State, if I recall. DJ is a football player. Senior day for him. He was outstanding, making people miss and just getting the tough yards. He had some big conversions on 3rd down.

**Q. What can you say about Damar Hamlin? He led the team with 11 tackles, and that's the most he's had since the bowl game last year.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, if you watched the game closely and you go back and watch the TV copy, we're down Brandon Hill, and Erick Hallett had to move from starting at corner at Florida State to starting at safety. We kind of switched it up, put Damar into the boundary and trusted Hallett to the field, but as soon as we did that they started attacking the field. So then the second half we flipped it and put Damar to the field and then they started going to the boundary. That tells you about the respect that people have for No. 3, Damar Hamlin. Again, another senior that I wish would take another year, but he needs to move on and go to the NFL, and he's an outstanding football player.

**Q. When you had three starting offensive linemen, leading receiver, leading tackler, that's a lot to lose. What did you sense about the team's confidence through the week? Did you sense they were a little bit nervous about this?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, it kept -- the confidence kept growing as the week went on. I think a lot of kids were looking at each other like what are we doing here, what's going on, are we going to play this game. I think there was a lot of indecision. I would compare it to where we were in August when we had a little issue in camp where people are wondering what's going to go on; are we going to be able to finish this season.

The kids found a way to get it done, but the confidence continued to rise, and it started on Tuesday's focus where Kenny Pickett had the focus and talked to the team and said, Listen, I don't care who's on the field; I'll play with any of my brothers here. And to me that was key; when he said that I was like, here we go, let's go. That's your senior leadership. That's your senior captain. He didn't care who was in front of him. He said we're going to get this thing done.

Like I said, incredible win for our kids today.

**Q. You kind of touched on it a little bit there at the end, but how big of a win is this for your seniors and sending them off the way that you guys did tonight?**

PAT NARDUZZI: It's a big time win. Where some players across the country are opting out, our kids stuck together and the seniors played their tails off. You can go right down the line; every one of them played. Pinnock, that one interception Jason Pinnock had where he just took it off and jumped over that dude and got that. That was an unbelievable interception. I'm just proud of every one of those guys.

**Q. With DJ Turner, this is the second game this season that he's had more than 50 yards. Both of those came either in games where you didn't have Addison or he didn't play for large stretches. Is there something about DJ that really embraces being the top go-to target and that allows him to have big games in those situations?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, he's a -- he'll catch the football. He's a special kid. Had a heck of a game. Just got to keep it rolling. DJ Turner is a football player.

**Q. Do you think this team was kind of eager to get back out there after the Georgia Tech postponement and everything that kind of happened last week and just that state of limbo really?**

PAT NARDUZZI: They were eager. Again, we wanted to play last week. I know they were disappointed we didn't get to go down there, but it was a safety issue. Again, we're just always going to protect our football team and our kids, and as much as we wanted to play that game, we just didn't feel good going down there.

But our kids were excited to be able to have another one. I talked about earlier, number nine, we've got to earn it. We earned eight going into that and we lost a game but it's postponed and we're going to get that thing on a Thursday night. But our kids were eager. Our kids love to play, and

it would have been disappointing to practice all week and not play the game.

I think that's one of the issues they had is like, Coach, are we going to practice all week and not play this game again. We just talked about being safe and wearing masks all the time and not letting your guard down.

**Q. What can you say about just watching Kenny develop over the years? His first start comes in a big upset against No. 2 Miami and then today he finishes off his Heinz Field career with 404 yards completing 36 of 52 passes. What can you say about watching him grow over the years?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, the best thing about Kenny besides his arm and his feet and the way he can run is he's a leader. We're going to dearly miss Kenny Pickett in another year, but we'll have a lot of time. Hopefully we'll get a spring practice this year and develop the rest of the guys.

But he's a leader. He's tough. He makes our offense tick.

**Q. You pretty much, I don't want to say ignored, but didn't use your run game much in the second quarter of those two long drives. Are you comfortable running an offense that way?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, I just want to score touchdowns. We talked about -- I think John asked the question earlier about how we finished a lot of drives. After three field goals, I think it was 9-0 kicking three field goals, so we didn't finish those drives off early and that score could have been a lot better than it was.

But whatever they're giving us -- you watch different teams, I mean, that's one of the top rushing offenses in the country. They got a lot of mop-up yards late in the game when we didn't really care if they were going to run it and eat the clock up and whether they got 40, 50 yards in the last drive.

I'm comfortable with us scoring touchdowns and I don't care if you run it, throw it. Just score points and get in the end zone. Whatever we have to do. Kenny's arm with really a makeshift offensive line that just got it done today, it doesn't matter.

**Q. You mentioned not being able to score touchdowns in the early part of that game. Do you see some sort of switch maybe sometime in the second quarter and at halftime when you really came out and pulled away down the stretch there?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, we got the run game going, and again, it comes down to confidence. Sometimes you run the ball early and you don't have as much success as you want to. But you've just got to keep pounding the football and you've got to take opportunities to run it. It just doesn't happen -- you're not going to have the first three runs go for 30 yards. You've just got to have patience, and again, the patience paid off today.

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