

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Pat Narduzzi Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Happy Monday. Really a Wednesday for us. I guess I'll -- I appreciate you guys being flexible with our time here. We kind of backed it up a little bit because our kids finished finals last week and tried to give them a little rest, a little sleep. I think EJ may have changed this thing a couple of times, but we thought it might be better to give our kids a little bit of rest, let them sleep in.

I guess we'll kind of start where we ended last I guess with the Clemson game. Obviously a disappointing game. I know you guys had a lot of questions after the game, and sometimes you can't answer all of them because you want to watch the tape.

Disappointing, disappointing game. Obviously a disappointing first quarter. That's where it all tumbled down really. I didn't want to get into this today because it's so far beyond, but like I normally do, we'll at least address any questions you may have after that.

Early turnovers will kill you. You can recover maybe against a Florida State with what we did and we got behind whatever 14-0, whatever it was down there in Tallahassee, but you do that against a Clemson, they'll eat you up. They're a really good football team, so I don't want to take anything away from what they are and who they are, but a lot of it had to do with our details weren't good enough.

And again, after we started like we did, I think things kind of fell apart. Our kids started to press both offensively and defensively, tried to make plays. We didn't tackle the way we've tackled all year. We had plays we could have made in the hole and didn't make them.

That was a long, long time ago. We're moving on to Georgia Tech. You guys can still ask some questions if you'd like.

But we're on to, I think, a really, really much improved Georgia Tech team. They gave us a fit down there a year ago. We get to go back again. I felt like we already had this conversation a couple weeks ago when it got



canceled. We feel pretty good right now that this thing is going to roll, but we got tested today. We'll get tested again tomorrow.

There's a new ACC protocol that normally we test Friday mornings, so if this was a Saturday game we would now have tested on Thursday instead of Friday, for whatever reason. We haven't had a problem with it. We've still got two more tests left to wait on, and again, tomorrow will be our last one, I guess.

But Georgia Tech, again, plays hard. Obviously on offense run the ball really well. They really stop the run. I don't know where they're ranked, but you watch what they do, they stop the run on defense, and again, they run the ball on offense. They did a nice job -- I'm sure most of you guys watched their game on Saturday, which we were tuned in, obviously, as a team here, and then you get to watch all the cut-ups during the week.

But a tough, physical team. They pride themselves on playing with effort, but so do we. So this is going to be an effort-and-guts team versus an effort-and-guts team.

I think that's kind of what we got. We've got to get back, play with good details and make another road trip down south and head to Atlanta and play, like I said, a very well-coached Jeff Collins team that plays their tails off. That's what we're in for.

Questions?

**Q. Why was the game moved from Saturday to Thursday, and does that affect the testing? Does it make it harder for you guys this week?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No, it doesn't. It doesn't make it hard. I'm not sure I can give you the reasons why, but I'll just tell you what I heard. It was originally scheduled for a Saturday. From what I gathered, it was because they have a commencement in the stadium, which I don't know if they have a commencement outdoors, I guess, but they had commencement on Saturday and they didn't want to move that. They had some kind of graduation ceremony going on, and it would be hard to have graduation, although you could socially distance and do the same thing in between each session name a couple guys and go. But that was the major reason that I've been told.



Now, is that the ultimate reason? I have no idea, but that's what I was told.

**Q. You said you think this thing is going to go. Did the testing go well last week for you guys?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't really talk about testing, but we're as good as we've been; put it that way. You know, we're as good as we've been. Again, that's got to stay that way. I can't tell you what happens between when we get off this Zoom, but right now we're pretty good. I can tell you that.

But you see what's happening in Pittsburgh and all over the country, this thing is not slowing down. It's surging faster. And like I said, it's a major victory our guys were able to get 10 in so far, but we're going to need help from Georgia Tech to get this thing in.

We're going to need help from our football team and our players. They're kids, and now they have no finals, so I'm hoping they're behaving in the evening. But our kids have sacrificed all year. Again, I'll say it again: I don't think people realize what our kids have done all year long to make these games happen, and for us to all enjoy it, for us to coach, they've really put their heart into it. My hat goes off to our football team and players across the country for doing what they do.

**Q. Along those lines, I wanted to ask you, with everything you guys have to do on a week-to-week basis just to get to the game, just to get the game actually played, has this been maybe the most challenging season of your career professionally speaking?**

PAT NARDUZZI: There's no question about it. There's no -- it's not even close. I mean, the whole -- everything, from June 8th coming back and -- and again, it's no different for me. It's the same for everybody else out there, so we all have to deal with the same things. Everybody has got different problems, but like I said, our kids have done a good job. I'm proud of the way they've handled themselves off the field and in this building when they're here with us, and that's all we can do.

It's one day at a time. It's literally one day at a time. If you go through a good day, you're like, man, we got through a good day. You know tomorrow there's going to be something that hits you square in the mouth. Just stuff that's -- yeah, it's been that type of year for sure. 2020, how many more days left in this year? Not many.

**Q. I think it's about 24. How confident are you that your team has earned a 12th opportunity, and literally**

**from a testing standpoint, do you have to just sort of stay in this bubble until you know for sure until there is going to be a 12th opportunity or not? And then what happens after that; is it just sort of the kids do what they want and then when you regroup in the spring you go back into testing? I don't know if they've even gotten that far yet.**

PAT NARDUZZI: I'll tell you next week. We're one day at a time. I'm just trying to get through today's test and tomorrow's test. We really haven't thought much ahead because we're focused on No. 11 and trying to earn No. 11, and then after No. 11 you ask did we earn a 12th. We'll find out Saturday. If our guys come out and do what they need to do and we're able to come out on top, then you earn No. 12 and then we have to -- okay, now where are we, what do we got to do now, how many more tests do we got, when is the game going to be played.

I know our kids and kids across the country are itching to have a little family time. I know that, especially around the holidays. Bowl season is never easy on our kids ever, and it will be even harder when we say you can't go home for Thanksgiving; you can't go see your parents; what are you doing; stop that. It's not an easy time for anybody.

**Q. Will your team definitely play in a bowl game if you get invited?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I assume so, yeah. That's my intentions.

**Q. It's not often you have a week off before the last game of the regular season. How has it been trying to keep the kids focused on this last game?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, they've been really good. We practiced once last week. We had meetings and lifts. We didn't go out there and grind it out on the field, but we had one really, really good day so really had three days off as far as practicing, practice on Wednesday and then Thursday, Friday, Saturday off and then a practice on Sunday. Had a really good one yesterday, energetic, had another one today that we just finished up a little bit ago, and tomorrow will be our "Thursday" practice, and they've been great with meetings and lifting and just trying to get their bodies as healthy and fresh as we can for this last one.

**Q. This is the last ACC game at least with this group of seniors. Have you had time to reflect on that?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. I'm worried about the next one. Every game could be their last. It's amazing; you kind of cherish each one of those. We tell our guys, you've got to play like it is your last. We never know. We hope it's

not the last one. We're always playing for another one.

After the game in the locker room, there will be more hugs. That's when -- but our guys aren't thinking about that. Senior day they think about the last one in Heinz, I think, but nobody ever thinks about it's going to be your last one. After the game on Saturday we'll have a good time in the locker room and there will be some more hugs there, knowing it's the last regular season game and move on to the next one.

**Q. You started preparing for Georgia Tech and then obviously it got postponed. Did much change in what you thought about this team from back then to what you saw Saturday?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. I mean, they do some different things, but you've got to be careful. They did a lot of unbalanced stuff last week against North Carolina, but they had done the same stuff. They are who they are. We're going to have to find out, hey, what do they want to do against us this year compared to what they did against us last year. We have a one-game scouting report on them versus Pitt and what they like to do against Pitt is going to be different versus what they did against North Carolina State.

It's really unknown, but they'll have their little tweaks in there. They're going to throw in some deep shots. Jeff Sims is an outstanding quarterback for a freshman. I'm really impressed with him. Their run game helps them, and then his ability to scramble, make plays, people miss and make plays with his feet are what stand out to me about Jeff and that offense.

**Q. You talked a lot about how late last year you saw the growth of players like Vincent Davis become more complete and mature. Who are some of the young guys that you've seen, like now that you guys are coming up on your last scheduled regular season game, who are some of the young guys that you've seen make that progression over the last couple weeks and leading up to this game?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, great question. There's a lot of guys, and I wish I had a list in front of me of guys or I'm going to miss somebody and feel bad.

I'll start after that BC game, seemed like forever, a lot of COVID tests ago, that we played two quarters in that game and wore them both out, and when you look at the progress that really -- you could talk Marquis Williams is young, but AJ Woods was the guy that came in after that game when we said we're going to have to play him, and AJ has really played pretty darned good I feel. I cannot tell

you I'm disappointed in him at all; really happy with him. Rashad Battle has come in and made some plays there, as well. Erick Hallett, yet another young guy that's getting his feet wet, last week at safety, starting against Florida State at corner. In the back end, those guys -- at the linebacker spot we're really old. SirVocea continues to impress. But one of the young guys who's gotten in a little bit is Kamara -- Bangally Kamara. Bangally has done an outstanding job for us, and he just continues to make plays on special teams with Rashad Battle.

Then offensively, young guys -- you know about Jordan, and I think Jaylon Barden continues to progress there. Those are some of the young guys.

And then of course starting that Clemson game like we did the week before without three starting offensive linemen, which didn't help Kenny at all against a different group than Virginia Tech was on the road, which makes it even harder with the noise. But really when you look at what Carson Van Lynn has done, Blake Zubovic, those guys have penciled themselves in as guys that are going to continue to get better. To get the quality reps that they've got, as well as my left tackle Matt Goncalves, the reps that they've got up front, you've got to say, hey, there's been some development there. Whether you win or lose, those guys got reps.

Good question. There's probably more of those guys out there that I missed, but those are ones that stand out to me right now that have gotten significant reps the last couple weeks.

**Q. Do you plan on mixing some of those young offensive linemen into the mix Thursday night?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, I hope not. I hope we have some different guys in there, but they've earned the right. Matt Goncalves has earned the right to get some reps, so yes, he will. Matt has really been solid at left tackle, and we're going to play our best five and then rotate guys in and keep them fresh for sure.

**Q. Without Lucas Krull pretty much all year, how would you assess the tight end unit and what Danny and Kyi and the tight end position, what they've done this year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, it's been average. I think that it shows with our run game. It's hard to run the game with four wideouts in a game with everybody detached. But one of the other young guys that I think continues to get better is Kyi Wright. Kyi Wright was banged up the middle of the season. He's come back strong, he's gotten stronger and he feels healthier, so a little bit more snap and pop to him

when he does get in with somebody blocking him. So Kyi Wright would be another one of those young guys that I'd say. But it's been okay. It's not where you want it to be, and you look around the country and see some of these big tight ends blocking people, that's what we need.

It'll be good, Lucas is getting healthier by the day. Maybe No. 12, he'd be ready to go, I don't know. We thought maybe this week, but -- and maybe he will be ready for this week, I don't know. There's a slim chance. He's been out there doing a heck of a lot more every practice.

**Q. You're a little over a week from National Letter of Intent day. How do you feel overall about the commitments you have and how your staff has done recruiting this year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, our guys have done a great job. It's been a different year, just we talk 2020, for our football team and for all these poor kids out there. This 2020 class, recruiting class has been tough for them recruiting-wise, not visiting any campuses, having a relationship like we're having right now. I miss you guys. I miss seeing you guys wandering the indoor after practice and before practice.

It's just a different feel, just like it is for you guys. It's a little different sitting on a Zoom call as opposed to face-to-face. I feel good with where we are, and again, that's like saying you feel good going -- we had good practices. The signing date is coming up on the 16th and then reevaluate and go, but I think our kids have been pretty solid and sound and very loyal to us, and we continue to (knocks wood) continue to work and look at our needs and try to assess those needs.

**Q. You mentioned Lucas Krull. He's one of the seniors you still expect to come back in 2021?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes, sir, for sure. I would say you can probably put his name in ink. He's certainly coming back. Great kid. If we can get another couple of games out of him this year, great; if not, we've got him back for another year.

**Q. Thursday night do you have any -- are there any players who might not be playing, not due to COVID reasons but maybe seniors who made training plans and then this game gets a schedule change and then they're not playing on Thursday night?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, we'll find out Thursday night. Right now I don't -- we'll find out who's on the field Thursday night, period, whether it's COVID related, banged up. Every day it's a new day.

**Q. Do you worry about the emotional toll that just this last -- what has it been, these kids have been in school since June, getting back into it, and now there is a light at the end of the tunnel, whether it's Saturday or whether it's a month from now after the bowl game, do you worry about the collective emotional weight of this just sort of affecting their readiness?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Their readiness for?

**Q. To play, to be up and to be ready to play with the energy that they're going to need to be successful down there.**

PAT NARDUZZI: For Thursday night you're talking? What, a month ahead? I thought you were worried about something that happens in a month. Our guys are locked in right now. I'm not worried about that at all. Again, we've had two energetic practices. There's been details out there.

Our kids look ready to roll, and that's all I can base it on. Our coaches are ready to go. We're ready to coach. They're ready to play. I'm not really worried about anything else but that, and I'm worried about what we do afterwards. That's what I thought you were -- where are we after that, then I worry about where we go there. But we'll worry about today.

**Q. With signing day next week and there's a game, you've never pushed it that close. How do you kind of juggle the time?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Finding a way. Luckily we had an open weekend last week and you're getting on a little bit more Zoom calls, but you just find a way to get it done. We did it a couple years ago when we played an extra game. We played 12 plus an ACC Championship game in 2018. I think the ACC Championship game was on the 7th, we lost a week in recruiting and I don't remember when the signing day was there but we lost a week. We were supposed to go on the road for two weeks and we had one week on the road, so we're used to juggling it, especially in a COVID year. We'll find a way. We're not on the road recruiting, so it's not like I missed a flight or I couldn't go fly here or there. Your phones work all night. They never shut them off.

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