

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Hope everybody's doing well. Hope everybody's staying safe out there with this big old snowstorm we got going on here. I'm going to have to get our staff out of here early today. Make sure we don't have any problems.

But welcome again. Another signing day here at Pitt and one that we're awful excited to bring these 21 guys into our class. This whole entire process has been really crazy for these, this, really, entire class, for our coaches and everybody involved. It's been done a different way, and the resilience and, really, adversity that we talk about on our football team every year, what they have had to go through is going to make this class strong.

This class was done like that this morning. It was like bang, bang, bang, bang, done. I think by 9:30 this morning, you guys can check your Tweets, it seemed like it was already done as far as just getting everybody in. Again, that just tells you what kind of class. It's not a needy class. It's a, Coach, this is where we're going, let's go, I'm in. And then there's no turning back. And that's kind of what I love about this class so far.

So really love every one of these kids that's coming into this program. I wish I knew them better than I do. To me this recruiting process is going to go on and on until they get here. And when they get on campus, whether they're midyear or whether they're coming in the summer for summer school, it's going to be a constant recruiting process to really show them everything on campus because they don't know as much about the university of Pittsburgh and this staff, the facilities, as we really want them to. And again, you can look at it on Zoom, but until you know the people, and I'm big on people and relationships, I feel like I want them to know even more and you just can't get it over a Zoom call, I don't think.

So again, I want to thank all of our families, all of the players for their trust through this entire process because, and I think I thank all of our classes every year, but this class especially for the trust they have had in us.



Again, I'm going to start off just thanking our staff, our entire coaching staff. Not as much the wives, except that the wives putting up with us. In the past, the wives have a big part in this recruiting because on a 48-hour weekend they would spend a lot of time with our families. Their job is going to be, I think, in the summer when they come here or even at midyear, we're going to try to bring them in when they check in to their apartments, just so they get to know the other half of our families because that's awful important.

But our coaches did a heck of a job. And this whole process started, guys, as you know, when those "Pitt is it" Tweets started going out was back when we were in quarantine and we were locked in our houses and we were working 12-hour days, we were working longer hours at home than we were here because that's all we could do is watch recruiting tape, and Zoom players. And it just became, I mean, we were obsessed with just recruiting because that's all we had. We didn't have our players. Obviously, we were having meetings with our players, but you didn't have them here. It was just less to deal with.

So our coaches did a heck of a job and I can't thank those guys enough. The class has a ton of variety. Very versatile. We got guys that can play in a lot of different positions and you recruit them at one position and who knows what they will end up being when they get here. But we had 11 on offense. We got 10 on defense. When you talk about the big guys that, we call them the power, we have eight power guys, so it's a big, that was our highest number. We had seven skill guys when you talk receivers and DBs. And then we had just six big skills, so that was our lowest number as far as those type of athletes. And I think they all, that big skill is a tight end linebacker-type guys, big running backs.

So we're going to have nine midyear enrollees, which is the most we have ever had. And you guys can check, in the last six years, but I feel like maybe, I guess last year we had quite a bit. EJ, how many did we have last year, EJ, six?

Q. I believe it was a half dozen, Coach, yeah.

PAT NARDUZZI: So nine is the most. We almost had 10. But it was best that the one guy just to stay and take care of family more than anything. So nine of those again, Nate



Yarnell will be here midyear, quarterback; Malik Newton running back; Myles Austin, receiver; Gavin Bartholomew, tight end; Jake Renda, another tight end; and then Terrence Enos, big lineman; Terrence Rankl from Massillon; and then Nahki Johnson as well. So those are the guys that will be here midyear.

So January 19th is when our next semester starts, so we expect to get them here. Still trying to make plans on when they get here, but we're hoping to have kind of an unofficial official visit on that day. Maybe we'll even make them available to media sometime that, during those times, which I haven't talked to EJ about that. Sorry, EJ.

Again, 21 signees, 10 different states, six of them from Pennsylvania, right here in our backyard, which I'm awful proud of. I won't hit each one of those guys. You guys know. But six of them right in the backyard. And we always want to recruit our backyard, I'll start there. This, but we're also going to try to get the best. And for a COVID year for us to have a loaded Pennsylvania area was a blessing really. It would have been hard to go down to Florida or go to Alabama or Georgia and scoop up a lot of guys. So to get six right here in Pennsylvania, we didn't get the six here in Pennsylvania because it was a COVID year, Oh, we just got to stay home and take whatever's here. We got six of the top guys in the state of Pennsylvania and we are fired up about those guys. We got four from Virginia.

And again, I'll go back. PA, let's just talk recruiting coaches and again, I told you our coaches did a great job and we do it several ways. Obviously, I'm involved in every one of these, guys, but it starts with our area coach and in PA Cory Sanders, who's got that Philly area, and pretty much Cory Sanders and Dave Borbely have this Pittsburgh/western Pennsylvania area, so we have, really, two in that area.

And then we talk about the Virginia area, which really, Chris Beatty has that entire area and did a great job getting four out of Virginia.

We got two in Ohio. And again, in northeast Ohio, we have Archie Collins up there that was involved with Terrence Rankl over at Massillon and Tamarion check, check, I don't have that. There's another guy we got. Did anybody catch that word right there? You did? Who caught that? You know who I'm talking about? I see you shaking your head.

Q. I think I've heard that name before.

PAT NARDUZZI: What was the last thing? I can't hear you. I can't hear you.

Q. I've heard that name before is what I said.

PAT NARDUZZI: You know the last name or did I, did I give it away?

Q. Yeah, yeah, I mean, it's a pretty unique first name so.

PAT NARDUZZI: Maybe, I mumbled through it and went fast and you couldn't hear it.

So the one that you probably don't know about right now is a kid from Cincinnati, Ohio. Tamarion Crumpley has committed to us as well early this morning. He was going to do it at 1 o'clock, so we're kind of announcing at the same time. But I didn't want to mention that one until later on, but Tamarion, fired up to have him in this class.

Got two from Georgia. And again, really, Coach Collins, I think, is involved in both of those down there, I believe.

We got two in Michigan, which, again, I give Coach Collins a heck of a lot of credit because I didn't feel like we could get a guys out of Big-10 country up in Michigan and he proved me wrong. So heck of a job again by Coach Collins up there.

In Maryland, we got Jaden Bradley, one there to get Andre Powell's area.

We got one from Utah, Trey Andersen, which is really Coach Salem's area. He's got everywhere -- He's got everywhere. So if you're not sure what state it is, it's Salem's area.

Noah Biglow was over on the east side of Florida, and Coach Harley's got that one.

And then Jake Renda really was a New Jersey kid that Coach Salem and Coach Harley were involved in both because he's kind of a New Jersey and Florida kid at the same time.

So coaches did a heck of a job on all these guys. One of the interesting things, notes about this day is it was all done by DocuSign. There was not one fax that came in today, so I think the fax machine is officially dead. It will never be used in this program. We got through a smooth DocuSign period. So I think the COVID and all this virtual stuff has been good for us old ball coaches.

16 of these signees that we had of the 21 were here, were signed with us or committed to us, I should say, prior to September 1st when the season started, or at least September.

14 of the 21 players were on campus prior to the country pretty much shutting down in March. So we were lucky to get 14 of them there. But again, for a small period of time, and it was kind of a kind of meet and greet more than anything.

Five of these, five of the other signees were able to visit this campus on their own. And I'll kind of mention those as we go and if I miss one, you guys can correct me. But five of them were able to get on this campus and their parents paid for those trips. They came here. They weren't able to meet with any coaches. As a matter of fact, we couldn't even follow them on Face Time and, through the campus. NCAA rules, we couldn't even do that. So it's kind of like they're on their own. We gave them kind of a map and said, kind of like a, what do you call it? I don't know, just kind of like a map just kind of where to, what to see, where to go on campus. So I really thank those parents for taking the time to come up here and at least see what Pittsburgh's like.

And unfortunately there's been two young men that signed with us, you talk about trust, two young men today that signed with us have never been to Pittsburgh, okay, so their first time on campus will be when they get here, and those two guys are Preston Lavant and Noah Biglow, Georgia and Florida natives.

And we got four WPIALs, as we've talked about, how important the state of Pennsylvania is and obviously the WPIALs. So I think we're good there.

We thanked the coaches already. And, again, I want to thank really academics. I mean, you look at what we did in the past, usually we had an admissions thing and there's a lot different parts to a visit, but really this entire visit was the patience that our wives had when we were on the phones all day and Zooming from our home offices. So I thank all the wives out there and obviously our coaches. And then really Mike Farabaugh over at academics and his entire staff, and Penny Semaia over in Life Skills did a heck of a job of continuing to just kind of leave their schedule open. I mean, during that whole pandemic when they're home, it's like we got a calendar and when is Penny available? Okay, let's lock, you know, you know, whoever is it is, you know, Noah into that time. So I thank those guys.

And then, of course, Grant Wilbert and Adam Caltury, Carlo and our entire recruiting office has done an outstanding job. I think we get better and better, more detailed, every year we stay together and so I appreciate all the work our recruiting office has put in that thing.

So with that, I'll go through the class here briefly and I know you probably want to ask questions. I'm going to give that to you. Start with the offensive class. A guy that's midyear, Nate Yarnell, big 6'6", 190 pound quarterback. Did not play in his senior year, hurt just the tip, okay, of his finger and struggled with it all year. He could have probably played in the last game of the season here last weekend. The coaches chose to not play him in that game, and Tommy Mangino is the quarterback coach over there. Obviously, his dad is The Big Mangino, as far as the old Kansas coach, and coached with my dad at Youngstown State. So we had really good in with Tommy there, and was his quarterback coach and just absolutely loves him there. So just a big, strong-arm quarterback there with Nate and we're excited to get him in here in January.

The running back position, we ended up getting two. First one is Malik Newton from Lake Taylor high school in Virginia, Norfolk Virginia. Big, physical, punishing running back that, you know, I don't think our defense in the spring is going to enjoy trying to tackle this guy. He is a physical guy. We're looking forward to getting him here.

We got another make-you-miss, got ton of wiggle in Rodney Hammond from Ocean Lake -- or excuse me, from Booker T. Washington high school in Virginia, as well. Get another one of those Chris Beatty recruits. He's not as big as Malik, but's he's a guy that will make you miss. So we have got really a dual threat in the backfield there.

I have two receivers for you. The first one is Myles Austin, a kid from Ocean Lakes High School down in Virginia Beach, just kind of a speedster on the edge. I think he can play anywhere inside or outside, but will give us vertical stretch on the outside. Again, did not play his senior year, as well as really, talking about Malik, Rodney, and Myles from that Virginia area, did not play in a senior year because football was cancelled down there, but did participate in seven-on-sevens down there and really were all in the same league. So I think they had a blast, at least being in seven-on-seven. They couldn't play a football season but were able to play in a seven-on-seven.

So Myles Austin, another midyear guy that Kenny Pickett will be able to throw to this spring, so I'm excited about that.

The other big, long rangy, almost kind of a monster-style receiver that will go up and get the football is Jaden Bradley, a kid from Baltimore, Maryland, played for Coach MacGregor over at DeMatha Catholic, one of the top high schools in the state of Maryland over there in PG County. And Jaden is a super kid that we're excited to get, and again, another guy that did not play his senior year. He

thought about transferring about three different it high schools, and I'm kind of proud that he stuck, stuck with DeMatha regardless of having a season or not, and he'll get his degree from DeMatha.

Tight ends. Probably the best class of tight ends that I feel like we've signed since I've been here. Really excited about both of these guys. And we've struggled with that tight end category, and again, first, for a lot of reasons. There's not many of them out there, through the years, and with the very few that there are, it's kind of like the full back position, like, pretty soon there will be no tight ends out there. So it's a hard position to recruit to get what you want, but these two guys, I'll start off with Gavin Bartholomew, big tight end, 6' 4", 255-pound guy that was originally committed to Buffalo, and then Coach Salem was on him all the time, from Blue Mountain High School. And this guy plays everything. When you watch his tape, he's a quarterback, you know, in his senior year, I think he started last five games there, he plays it all, at defensive end, receiver, he's a punter, he does it all, he's versatile point of attack tight end. And when I first got on the phone with him, it's like he's a 25-year-old tight end. I mean, he's got a big old beard. And he'll be here midyear as well. So we're really excited to get both of our tight ends midyear. That's going to give them a great advantage to help us in our run game as well as the pass game, but the much needed run game, which, as you guys know, it's hard to have a different kind of style run game when you don't have any tight ends. That's kind of where we were most of the year when Lucas went down.

So Jake Renda, tight end, 6'4", 225 pounds. He's from Princeton. Played at the Hunt School -- Princeton, New Jersey, that is, played at the -- excuse me, um, I'm not sure what the high school was, but ended up being at IMG down in Florida, and just a super, super kid. He's got a ton of football reps, again, was a former quarterback for three years in high school, went to IMG, and again, he's got a ton of Pittsburgh roots in his family, so his family is excited to be here. We ended up flipping him from Michigan State and we're excited to have, I think, two excellent, excellent tight ends in our class.

We have got, again, four offensive linemen that we're really excited about, that starts with Terrence Rankl, probably one of the leaders of the class, leaders of his football team. I think in his years there they're 38-4 overall. He's a smart, smart offensive lineman, I think can play, really, three different positions up front. He can be a guard tackle or center, so he's very multiple. And obviously from Massillon High School and Coach Nate Moore over there, so we appreciate Coach Moore in helping us land Terrence.

Kyle Fugedi, a late guy in the process, who you watch on

tape and you just absolutely loved up in Michigan at Franklin High School. 6'6", 270-pound guy, came to campus during this dead period, I guess you want to call it, and was able to go around and just absolutely loved it. Decommitted from Miami of Ohio. Waited a week to think about it and then committed to us. We're excited to have him. He's a guy that can play inside or outside. He was a hockey player through his high school career, so we know he's a big, physical guy and good on his feet.

Terrence Enos, just a, probably an enormous, large is probably not the word, enormous physical mauling-type offensive lineman that just, just moves an entire defensive line by himself. He's from Cass Tech High School up in Michigan, and Coach Welcher is up there, good friend of mine through all the years that I spent up there, and we're fired up to have Terrence here as well. Again, a midyear player.

Terrence Rankl, midyear, Terrence Enos, midyear, Fugedi, we'll get in the summer. And then the last one is Trey Andersen, who is a big offensive lineman. I know some people say he's a tight end out there in the Rivals or rankings or whatever, but we recruited him as an offensive lineman, maybe he can sprinkle in there and help us kind of like a Grant Carrigan has in the past. But he's big athlete that, his dad played until the NFL. He was on a mission for the last two years, so he'll be a little bit older. He won't be just a 17- or 18-year-old high school player coming in. Very mature and we're excited about having him and his family out here. He, again, came out on his own. They went to a Steeler game, probably you guys saw on Twitter. Again, had no contact with him while I was here. As a matter of fact, I knew he was here and I didn't know he was going to the Steeler game, but his dad got hooked up there and what a great opportunity when you visit Pittsburgh to be able to go to the Steeler game.

So that's the end of our offense. Any questions on the offense? Maybe I'll open it up and let me breathe and let you guys ask a question on anybody there.

Q. You mention the guy who would be throwing the ball to Bradley, I mean, Kenny Pickett, just to get this out of the way, I guess, him announcing last night that he's coming back for one more year. When did you find out? And I guess how important is that for the 2021 team and kind of what you guys got going forward?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, it's, you know, as I was talking to some guys last night, probably the most important recruit and again, I want to get back on this class right after that question and it's a great question.

Obviously, we're, obviously the staff, you know, this building was kind of rocking this morning knowing that Kenny is coming back for another year and I found out last night, sort of when you did, obviously a little bit before. Had a lot of conversation with Kenny, his dad, Ken, and Casey, mom, really since the end of the season about what to do, how to do it. And it was not an easy decision for him because he's got an invite to the to go the Senior Bowl. I mean, he can go to the Senior Bowl if he wants to. I would imagine he can go to the combine, which those invites haven't come out yet, but if you go to the Senior Bowl, I don't think anybody would go to the Senior Bowl without going to the combine. The Senior Bowl is an elite grouping of players.

So he had opportunities and he texted me last night and said, Coach, I love Pittsburgh. I love this team. I'm coming back to finish what I started. That was his exact quote. And I was like, I texted him back and I was like, Kenny, I said, that's awesome, fired up, you know, great decision. I said, Tomorrow's signing day, how about we hold on it and then we'll make a big announcement on Thursday. Okay. And then I kind of waited for a response and I'm kind of waiting and you know how that little thing kind of spins in the text message, and he's not there, so I'm like, what's going on? So all of a sudden I get text messages and all of a sudden it pops up on the phone, Kenny is coming back for another year.

So he already released it and I was trying to get him to hold it back. But we're fired up for the Pickett family and obviously fired up for the Pitt football family.

So I'll move on with the defense. Okay. Defensively, again, talked about how many we had, but we got four defensive linemen. I think four exceptional defensive line men. Obviously if we lose some guys, so we're going to need reinforcement.

I'll start with Elliot Donald, Central Catholic High School. As you guys know, the Donald name, but this is Elliot, and Elliot's going to pave his own way here at Pitt. Obviously did not play for Central Catholic this year because of COVID-related issues, really worried about getting his family sick, his grandfather, which all understandable, and really respect that decision and the heart that's got there for his family.

But, again, probably the strongest guy on our football team to this point as far as in this class, just knowing what you know. Talked to him early this morning. He's getting ready to go over to grandpa's house and get another lift in the basement, so I told him I wanted some video. But strong, powerful, explosive guy inside, and he's gotten a lot bigger since his junior year at Central Catholic.

Dorien Ford, again, another enormous interior guy that is going to occupy a lot of space in there and plug up gaps, from Baldwin High School, 6'4", 295 pounds, probably. Just a super kid, just enjoyed recruiting him and we're fired up that he chose Pittsburgh.

And Nahki Johnson, an explosive, athletic, edge rushing-type guy that, we like to put pressure on the quarterback. It starts with a guy like him. Again, he's probably 235 pounds right now and getting bigger. He was a little bit banged up in his senior year. I think they only played about four games. And we saw him a year ago. I watched him play basketball. We're excited to have him with us.

And then the last one here on the defensive line Naquan Brown. Again, another Virginia Beach, Virginia high school player, played in seven-on-sevens, Ocean Lakes High School, Myles Austin's teammate, Coach Beatty, again stayed on him for a long time, originally committed to LSU, as you all know, and just a really versatile athlete. I think he could be a linebacker. He's, again, another edge rusher. He's probably about 215 pounds, but once he gets on four square meals a day, he's going to blow up and get big and explosive and I think he's got extreme athletic ability.

So that's our defensive line, which we're excited about. Only, we had one linebacker in this class, and really only felt like we needed one linebacker. The three guys we got last year, we're really excited about, and we felt, just when you look at your needs, we wanted one.

We got Preston Lavant, again, a down hill, physical tackle machine is really what I think he is. He's physical. He'll put his face on you. From Georgia, from Crisp County High School down in Georgia. So we're excited to have Preston with us. Again, one of those guys I told you earlier, had never been on campus, so I can't wait to get him up here. I'm going to personally give him a tour here.

And then we'll talk about our corners and again really wanted to load up in the secondary because of the guys we have lost. And we were, really felt like we were shorthanded this year as well, so five total guys in the secondary, with three corners.

First one I'll talk about, because these are all alphabetically, as you know, Khalil Anderson at corner, Atlanta, Georgia, Riverview High School. I think he can play at all four different spots in the secondary. This guy's a, he's a ball hawk. He goes after the ball. He's a return specialist. His dad is an NFL official, and has got a relationship with Mike Tomlin, so something kind of a little

bit special on that end because they obviously see each other on the field, just like I know some of the ACC officials. But so really, really just a super football player. Wish he was coming midyear, but we'll have to wait on him.

Noah Biglow, again, another guy that's never been on campus. Going back to Khalil, he did come on campus. I think it was in training camp when he was here, so we were practicing and he's on campus with his mom and dad, and kind of made a tour through some of the northern schools here. I won't mention where, but he took his visits, and after a that visit, probably about a week and a half later is when he committed to us. So we're excited it to get him signed this morning.

And then Noah Biglow, again, a guy not been on campus, from Wesley Chapel, Florida, Armwood-Tampa area, Armwood High School. Really nice size corner that loves to play man-to-man. He's got great hips and uses his hands well on defense. So with what we do on defense, both those guys really can do some great things at corner for us.

And then the one that I broke the news on today that just really committed to us yesterday but, or maybe two days ago, but wanted to keep it quiet today is Tamarion Crumpley. Rangy 6'1" 185-pound cornerback that will hit you. Originally was committed to Minnesota and we have been kind of on him all season. Played for Winton Woods High School in, down in Cincinnati, Ohio area, led them to a 9-1 record. They played a lot of football there in Ohio this year. And we're excited to get him in Pittsburgh. So again, will come in the summer.

And then we got two big-time safeties. First one, right here from Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, Stephon Hall from Central Valley High School. I'm hoping he's like a Jordan Whitehead. He will hit you like a Jordan Whitehead. Very physical. He will run through you. He's not going to just tackle you. He's not going to just wrap you up. He will run through you. So we love what Coach Lyons has produced over there in the high school and we're excited to have Steph in our program.

And then the last one is Javon McIntyre, a big six-foot 190-pound kid, lives in Delaware, went to Imhotep High School in Philly. Again, they did not play this season at Imhotep, so he's just been lifting and running and getting ready. And this entire class and family have been through a lot as we all have, so we're excited to get some stability and bringing this class here to Pittsburgh and continue to recruit them and love them up and coach them. So that's the class. Questions.

Q. There is some high schools, and maybe not many, that have postponed football until the spring. Are any of your guys going to play football in the spring, your recruits?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, that's a good question. I think Rodney Hammond is going to play. And I don't have a list of everyone of these, but Rodney is one of the ones I think may, but I would have to double-check on that. That's the only one that I can, I can think of that may be playing this spring. But they can make up their mind whether they're going to play or not. I don't know.

And again, it's just kind of like bowl games, are they going to be playing or not. Right now they're saying they're going to be played. I knew there was going to be no -- I think we talked about this. I knew there was going to be no fall season for college football in January. I mean, they talked about possibly a January. I knew there was going to be no way if we didn't get a fall season in. So some of those schools, I think, anticipated playing in September and didn't. And then thinking they're going to play in January, February or March. I don't know. So, but I think Rodney is one that may.

Q. You okay with that him playing in the spring before he reports to Pitt about a month later?

PAT NARDUZZI: Heck, yeah. You think we're scared? I want Rodney to go play. I think any time you sit out of this game too long -- this is not basketball, okay. And again -- and I love basketball -- but we could, you know, I could take, you know, you, Jerry, we'll take Amanda, Jim, Chris, Chris, you're on the other team. I'll take R J. We can get 10 guys together and go play a basketball game. And if we did it every day, we would get better. You would definitely get better. Jerry, I could make you better, if you were on my team, because I'm going to push you, okay. But it's hard to play the game of football -- you can't go out there nobody plays flag football any more, you just can't go out there and play football. You can't get in a leverage position, you can't block, you can't tackle, it just doesn't happen.

Now it may have happened back when I grew up in the '80s and you could tackle people in the front yard. But you don't have that ability. And I think any time you stay out of football for a long time it hurts you. So any of our players that did not play -- and again, seven-on-seven gives you a little bit, but that's like basketball, in my opinion. But it's a contact sport and you can't simulate a contact sport.

So the more they can play I'm good with it. What's the different finishing in December or finishing in March? Those kids are young, they will be ready to go. If they get

banged up, they get banged up. But that's the game of football, I'm not really worried about any injuries. I want them to go play football, that's what they love to do and if that's what they want to do, let them go play.

Q. How much did you sell the three Pittsburgh defensive linemen on playing together and how much did they recruit each other?

PAT NARDUZZI: They did a great job recruiting each other for sure. I think each individual has to make a decision for themselves as what's best for them. To sell them, hey can you play with him and you can play with him, only four guys play at one time. And so I think -- I hate to lump guys and say, Hey, this is a, you guys all do it together. Even though they're all friends and again they're going to continue to be even better friends, they know each other and -- but once they get all here together it's going to be bigger -- but I like to stay away from saying, Hey it's a package deal, you guys all come together, and use that, because that doesn't always work out.

They got to make individual decisions for themselves for the right reasons. And it's all about making good decisions and I try to stay away from that, at least personally I stay away from that.

Q. This is the only time ever for a freshman class to come in where essentially every player ahead of them has red shirted. What do you tell them about opportunities and how that plays out?

PAT NARDUZZI: Really haven't talked about it. All these guys want to come in and compete. You look at the redshirt, but the redshirt doesn't matter, it's still a group of guys that are on a depth chart. And you guys know how that depth chart is. I wish all these guys were with us last fall, we could have used them as some of those weeks that got dwindled down and we didn't have guys.

So really not worried about the depth chart. We want to get these guys in here, want to get them coached and give them an opportunity to play and we'll play as many guys that are ready to play.

Q. These local defensive linemen when do you remember realizing that there was - I mean this is looking like maybe the best group of WPIAL defensive linemen in decades, having all the guys in the same class. When do you remember realizing that there was kind of something special in this group coming up? I mean, you've been here since they have been in middle school.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, well we knew they were all

special, put it that way, and Nahki was the first one to commit to us, so he became special right away. And I think he led the charge in this entire class. So again I thank him for that.

But we knew they were all special a couple years ago, we have been watching -- I watched Elliot at a playoff game live a year ago, so I got a live evaluation, not many of them did I get live evaluations. I watched Nahki play basketball. Didn't get a football evaluation on him. So then Dorien, just spent a lot of time in his high school as well with his old coach in the past and again have -- as a matter of fact, I think did I watch a football game of his one Friday night. So I mean, again, we have known they're special and, again, they're all each individuals and we're just thankful that western Pennsylvania was so gifted athletically.

Q. Have your top rated -- and I know you don't necessarily care or pay attention to that -- but seems like some of your better players in this class are on that defensive line, just sort of like some of your better players on the team this year were on your defensive line. Do you see that becoming sort of a calling card of this defense or something that can be part of an identity to have those really talented defensive linemen kind of lead the way for your defense?

PAT NARDUZZI: Like the Panther Steel Curtain or something like that, huh? I hope we have talented players at every position, because it's hard just to win with one talented position. But we'll take a calling card -- I'm sure Coach Partridge takes pride in what his guys are doing. I look at Rashad Weaver and Patrick Jones leaving and that we got to develop some new young guys at the defensive end position, we know Deslin is good and all that and John Morgan.

But you look at our linebacker group and we got some talented linebackers and they're going to be a year older and you look at Cam Bright, I'm excited about what he's got. So Coach Hart I'm sure takes pride in that. Coach Borbely, our offensive line, I'm excited about our O-line next year. So there's a lot of pieces. Some guys are a going to get sacks and some guys are going to get pancakes. Which ones do people start to gravitate towards? Nobody really sees the pancake because there's -- they don't get many awards for pancakes, but everybody sees and hears the sacks. And obviously our linebackers are getting sacks and people see the interceptions and they see the wide open big hits. Everybody sees Jordan Addison and D.J. Turner making big plays and obviously that quarterback that's making those throws.

So I hope we got players at every position and I don't want to sit here and say it's a D-line world here in Pittsburgh

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

because it's a football world. We're in the city of Pittsburgh, it's the city of champions and that's what we're working towards and we're going to need athletes at every position.

Q. Does Malik Newton bring something to your running game that maybe you didn't have this year?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's going to be a different style, that's for sure. I mean, he's going to be more in the mode of a Darrin Hall, Qadree Ollison, James Conner, Le'Veon Bell that I was used to up north. So, yeah I think so. I mean he's a bigger back and there's not many of them out there. So we're going to -- great thing is we got him in spring, and Daniel Carter's kind of that bigger back, but not as tall a back. So this is a big, big guy who can run -- I think he rushed for over 5,000 yards in high school -- and that's without his senior year, because I don't think they ran the ball in seven-on-seven.

Q. You mentioned Newton is one of four guys that you guys got from Virginia. Do you see that as an important recruiting win within the context of the ACC with a couple of schools down there, to be able to, with the job that Chris Beatty did, to get down interest and get four really talented guys out of that state?

PAT NARDUZZI: Chris has got a good of contacts as any coach I've been around. I got some contacts in northeast Ohio, but it's not, there's not as many players up there, just from growing up in that area. And Chris grew up in that area, spent a lot of time in that area and very well respected down there.

Coaches love him. When I walk in it's like he's got a brother, as far as like just like one of his brothers as a high school coach in each one of those places.

So we trust the coaches down there, and again, Coach Beatty's done a heck of a job in that area and those contacts help. And we knew when we hired Chris Beatty that not only was he an outstanding wide receiver coach, that he was an outstanding recruiter.

Q. There were a couple late offers that came in for Khalil Anderson from, I know from Penn State and Miami. Were you at all worried about losing him?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not at all. Khalil has been like as solid as solid as solid as you could be. There was never any waiver out of Khalil Anderson or his family. It's a family of integrity. And there was never any conversations like, Hey, don't do that, don't -- you know, kids want to, kids want to they want to put their offers on Twitter, we have kind of given up on, Hey, don't post that. They want to get

excited about it.

And to me it's, hey, it is what it is. We're in a world of social media and they get love on social media and it makes them feel good. But Khalil's been like, I mean, I love that guy, I appreciate his trust in us. And like I said, he never ever wavered. When he came up here with his parents and saw Pittsburgh, and walked around on his own or drove around on his own, he has been solid as anybody in this class.

Q. This is a different year for, obviously, for playing football. Also a different year for recruiting. How is it different for you this year and what's your -- of all the kids you recruited and talked to over Zoom, what's your favorite story?

PAT NARDUZZI: You always ask me a favorite story and I really -- E.J. next year remind me to think about it for about 10 minutes favorite story, because I know you guys don't want me to think for 10 minutes. But I can't tell you there's a favorite, favorite story on Zoom. I mean it's just --

Q. Maybe an interesting story, off the beaten path.

PAT NARDUZZI: Okay. Might have to call you back on that I'm going to have to text you back. Do you have anything to remind me Graham? Because I know I tell Graham all the stories. Anything, Graham.

Q. If I get one I'll shout it out.

PAT NARDUZZI: Near the end we'll come back to that and, Graham, you and Adam can think about it, but I can't think of anything that is really going to get you all excited. It's all been Zoom. I mean, it's been Zoom and when they come on campus you can't see them.

So wish I had one for you. If I think of one -- if Adam and Graham think of one, maybe Carlo, Carlo's goofy enough to figure one out. What's up Larry? But we'll figure out something for you.

Q. How about an easier one. Do you expect anybody, do you expect Kenny Pickett to be the Pied Piper and bring some guys back that might have been leaving?

PAT NARDUZZI: There's a chance. I mean, you know, most impressive thing is the kids retweet and last thing's saying, That's my guy, that's my guy. So there's a chance that some other guys could come back, we'll see. And again, just like these high school players, each individual's got to make a decision for them, not for Kenny, not for me, it's for their personal reasons. So I will be sure to make sure -- I don't want any, I don't want any regrets, I don't

want someone to say, Well I came back because of him. I want them to come back because they want to come back and they want to come back for them.

So I think Kenny can bring them back and Kenny can recruit them and I can recruit them, but I try to stay away from recruiting them, I want to educate them and I want to get what's best for them.

And I think that's what -- Kenny thought about it long and hard. I mean, long and hard. Shoot, a half hour, a half hour before he texted me the text I kind of read to you -- I hope Kenny doesn't mind -- I mean, he, him and his dad called me again and was like, Coach, just a tough decision. I said, How you doing? He's like, Oh, I'm struggling, coach. And then half hour later he wasn't struggling.

So he went back and forth and what should I do. And like I said Mark Whipple did a great job, he did an incredible job of getting feedback from NFL scouts throughout the country. I mean, all over. He's got -- because he was in the league he talked to a lot of people -- I know Kenny talked with Peyton Manning -- we're going to try to get him on a Zoom tomorrow -- he talked to Peyton Manning, he reached out and did his homework you talk about a guy doing his homework, trying to figure out, where am I going to do and what can I do to improve, he did his homework and made a great decision for Kenny Pickett.

Q. Is it safe to assume then that Kenny came back to work with Mark for another year?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, it's safe to say. Yeah, I would hope. He came back to work with me too and Coach Beatty and E.J. and Carlo.

Q. With this year and with recruiting when you can't go out and see these guys in person and meet them in person, what lengths have you had to go to to make sure that a guy you think is 6' 3" isn't going to show up and be 5' 11"? You know what I mean? That guys are as big as they say they are, since you're not actually seeing them in person.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, that's a great question. There's a lot of things that these young, these 21 young men don't know about us and I want them to get as much information as they can; and there's a lot of things we don't know about them, so we need to continue to learn.

But the one thing I'm not worried about is how tall they are. We can go by the sizes here and people think Kenny Pickett is 6'2" I read somewhere 6'2" I'm like, that guys's 6'3" and a half. Sizes don't really matter. You look at some of the guys that play in the NFL -- like tell Aaron

Donald size matters, okay. So really size doesn't matter. When they get there who are -- we love what they do on tape, we love them as people and that's really what's going to matter. I'm not going to worry and say, Well, God, I thought you were 5'11", you're only 5'10". It doesn't really matter. I mean, we get fooled by that every year it doesn't matter. Because you're looking at eyeball -- very rarely do you go in and measure a guy.

Q. How do you do the February signing period now and do you expect to remain active for that period as well?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I love the February signing period. When you look at the old February signing period, I mean, it's been a long year, I think these kids were excited to sign today the national letter of intent. It's a long process. I mean, you think about it, February the kids came on campus, I believe. But then March was dead for the first time ever, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, you think about all the darn months that these kids have had no opportunities.

What are they going to do in January? I mean, it's dead, it's cold, it's snowy, and there's no place to go. So I think that the December signing period is the absolute way to go. It is the signing, it's not the early signing period, to me it is the signing period.

Q. According to, I think, again, I know the rankings are not your thing, but according to the rankings, this will be one of your better classes since you've been here at Pitt. Does it feel like that to you and has it felt like that as you were working through this process that this had a chance to be a special class or one of the better ones that you've recruited?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, I mean, you're exactly right, I'm not into all the rankings. It doesn't matter. We're going to find out who our best players are in the end in two or three years. And then, again, I'm not just, it's not coach talk or whatever, I'm, really, the guys that were ranked, the guys that put them in there, it's all based on who you are and who you have working for you. I mean, it just doesn't make any sense, guys. I mean, players are players. We have got to develop them, we got to have great character guys that are developable in themselves, and that's what it comes down to.

But this class I don't feel any differently than I felt than last class or my first class. We always get high-quality guys that want to graduate from the University of Pittsburgh and they have, okay. Guys that want to graduate and guys that want to play football. And our guys are going to play until the end, every game, every year. And that's what I'm

looking for is tough guys that match the city of Pittsburgh.

But I don't know where the class is ranked, I don't care about four stars, it doesn't matter. There's some two stars and some three stars that are as good as any four- or five-star guy out there. So if you want to listen to rankings, it just doesn't matter it doesn't matter when you got a top-10 class it doesn't matter if you got a top-80 class, it doesn't matter. You got a story for me Graham?

Q. Not much. Maybe the reason we had to do the Louis Riddick video that went viral. We had Carlo and Mickey driving around campus for that tour.

PAT NARDUZZI: Oh, here's a funny story for you. Carlo. I'm like, We got to test this out. So Carlo gets on a Zoom, he's got a phone, that thing's shaking around, it's the worse video ever. Yeah. It was bad. I was like, well this is, we're not doing this any more. And again, we wanted to see what it looked like, we had our whole staff on Zoom as Carlo is driving around campus. And again we had a driver too, so it wasn't like -- it was like there's just no way we can give tours like that. So thank God we got a hold of Louis Riddick and he did that absolutely outstanding video for us that really gave people a sense of what the city of Pittsburgh is like and obviously the university.

But yeah, Carlo, the worse Zoom -- and he's a great tour guide on campus, but not with a phone on the dashboard. It was bad. I mean it was just bad.

Q. Because you weren't able to see a lot of these guys and you had to tell them about Pittsburgh how important is that video side, those guys that produce those videos. To be able to show what Pittsburgh and your program is about?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean Greg and Max over in our video office, Chad Bogard would like to take credit for it -- joking in case Chad's listening, he didn't have anything to do with that video. But our video people did an outstanding job, but it's real important. It's important when kids can visit to have video and the access to that, but then when you, when the campus gets shut down and you're in pandemic it becomes, I mean, it becomes real important. And it took awhile to make that video and Louis Riddick took a lot of time to put his time into that incredible video. So we'll use that for years to come just to get them here to see the real thing so it's going to help us and again we found new innovative ways of really reaching our players and obviously Zoom and really Facetime have been critical in this entire process.

I mean, one of the -- here's a funny story for you -- here's one for you, just a today story. Is -- I would swear,

probably in COVID, if I talked to 21 guys today, that probably 17 of them had no shirt on today, when they're saying, Hey, my paper's here. I wish I had a screen shot of each one of them, none of them have shirts on. I think I saw one tank top, I think Gavin had a tank top on. So it's bad when I can tell you who had one. So it's a beautiful class, good looking dudes, I can tell you that. So we got a physical evaluation today, because they're just hanging out in the house doing homework and they got no shirts on.

Q. Are they showing off for you?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, that's just kind of how they hang out in December wherever they are. I don't think there was any show off. A couple of them I told them, Hey, we got to get you in the weight room. They got this structure to them and once they get with Coach Stacchiotti they're going to get real big and fast.

Well we hope there's more to come with Kenny Pickett and we couldn't be more excited about Kenny coming back and it starts right there, it starts at that quarterback and it also gives our quarterbacks who didn't have a spring a year ago to develop and find out who that next guy is too.

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