

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

Friday, August 6, 2021

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

COACH NARDUZZI: Welcome back to the Pitt facility, the Graf (phonetic) Center. This is where we practice every day. You guys haven't really seen it on Zoom. We're excited to get this 2001 season going.

It's great, watching that game last night the Steelers and Cowboys, watching fans in the stands and watching coaches on the sideline without masks on. We're trying to get away from the masks as much as we can.

I know there's times I still have a mask on. So, I appreciate Amanda up there with the mask. I appreciate that. I put mine on sometimes depending where I go. Good stuff. But we've all got to continue to protect ourselves. We know it's not gone. But we're in a heck of a lot better place than we were a year ago at this time. So we're blessed to be here and fired up for a season.

Questions?

Q. (Indiscernible) days, I think it's around 90 percent vaccination rate, where are you guys at?

COACH NARDUZZI: I think we're probably 94, I guess. So we're not going backwards, I can guarantee you that. It's not going to go backwards. I don't have the exact percentage because they're so good that our training room hasn't given me another one. I know if we add two, whatever that percentage is, it's not at 92. So it's probably 93.5 or something like that. So we're doing good.

Q. Somebody restricted (indiscernible) allergies, for some reason where they can't get the vaccine, can they participate?

COACH NARDUZZI: Should I give them an example? I don't know. I'll throw it out there because it's a real fact. I'll just say this, I won't give names but we have a guy on the team that just got it yesterday, he's one of the new additions, and has been very, very leery of getting it because he has a major reaction to stuff.

So it wasn't that he was believing all the whatever the news



or the fake news or whatever it is; it was that he just was kind of worried. As a matter of fact, his freshman year -- not giving any names away, he loves macaroni and cheese. Chef Kevin downstairs had lobster mac and cheese. He's allergic to shellfish. But he separated it when he got it on the plate; he put the seafood over there and ate the pasta.

We've know he's had allergic reactions, so that plays a factor. The one guy who has allergic reactions got it done. I think he's happy. He was scared and had no reaction at all. Thank God. I would have felt terrible. We took him to the hospital, made sure it wasn't just 15 minutes sit there. Sit there for an hour afterwards make sure there's nothing.

Q. In spring camp, seeing three quarterbacks getting a lot of time in that spring game, where do things stand at the quarterback level?

COACH NARDUZZI: Good to talk football. Went to media day the other day and everybody wanted to talk about everything but the players, the teams, the competitions. There's a lot of competition.

I'll say this: Strength-wise, our team is in great shape -- we'll get back to the quarterbacks -- the team's in great shape. Coach Stacchiotti and his staff have done an unbelievable job, a little different philosophy from what we've done in the past. It's the first time he's had a summer conditioning, a spring ball and a winter conditioning program. So he's got the whole thing together.

I think our kids are confident. I think they're stronger and faster and bigger. I don't know what they looked like to the eyeball to you guys. Probably looked like a bunch of animals out there, because you haven't seen anything. You have been looking at your wives and husbands for a long time. They probably don't look like our players.

But they are big, fast, and we're running a lot. Our guys are in great shape. Our skill guys ran all the way to Akron, Ohio. I think it's 113 miles. When I say that, they didn't do it in one trip. With all the running we did through the summer, if you add it all up, day one to day whatever it is, the distance was to Akron.

Our big skill -- linebackers, tight ends -- they went to



Canton, Ohio. And the big guys went to Wheeling. When you look at the mileage, you can track it, as you would have walked there, they're not taken the highways, as the crow flies, is the distance that they went. It's pretty impressive the conditioning here.

To your point, quarterback-wise, they're going to get their work. Right now as we start practice one, it's Kenny. It's Nick and then Joey and Davis. And those two guys are fighting for that third spot right now. But that's the beginning.

As I said last spring, Vince Davis is the guy. Now it's Izzy. There's a lot of things that are going to happen here. That's why you love camp and competition.

We talk about, you heard this, getting 3 percent better. Our guys are okay today, practice one. They looked like they've been coaching themselves all summer, which they have been. For the most part they've done skully by themselves. It gets sloppy. Players come to me, Coach, that was bad. It's good. This is where we are, and this is where we're going. Every day they'll show improvement because they have coaches there.

Q. (Indiscernible) trusting, experiencing, (indiscernible) spring game as well?

COACH NARDUZZI: They played well in spring. And he practiced. Last fall, don't want to go through the numbers, but I know one guy missed 38 total days. You don't have a spring and you miss 38 days, but Nick might have been the second guy whether it was traced out or COVID, whatever it may have been, he missed a lot of days, missed a lot of practice. Hard to play any position if you miss practice. Certainly hard to compete when you're not there.

Q. What separated Izzy? What stood stood out for you?

COACH NARDUZZI: What separated Izzy at this point, he's big, physical, fast and consistent. There's not this up and down. He's gotten better from last season where he might run a wrong route, or North Carolina State, when Kenny got whacked, it was a pick-6 but it got called back for targeting, that was Izzy's guy that ran through a B-gap I believe. And it was, oh, excuse me, sorry about that. Missed that one.

But he's been consistent. And he's focused. I think he's serious about his game. He wants to be the guy. Right now he's more serious and more disciplined. And Vince is there. Daniel Carter had a couple nice cuts today. So we'll see. I'm not going to anoint Izzy the guy yet because we'll see, we'll see where they are when we get to UMass.

Q. Last year, the buzz word was "opt outs." Is that something that you and other coach have to worry about?

COACH NARDUZZI: I sure hope not. Last year was an odd year. I hope that word's gone away, to be honest with you. I hope everybody forgets what that is.

The portal is still the portal and guys still go into the portal. And for whatever reason -- and I guess I'll just give you the Danny Moraga, was with us all summer. And I guess for personal reasons, we gave him a couple of days off, he went back to California. And for personal reasons he's staying in California right now. And I'll just say this, he was in the car with his girlfriend headed to the airport and then they turned around and came back.

So that's the story. We wish he was here. My goal was to make sure guys have opportunities to play. I know we've got more depth at tight end than ever. I want to make sure he gets his degree. But he'll find another spot. And we'll move on from there.

Q. Has managing the transfer portal gotten easier since it exploded last year?

COACH NARDUZZI: It's the same. There's no management. Just coach your guys, love up your guys. I think we've got a great culture here. I'm not really worried about it. It wasn't a case where he didn't like being here. You like to see a guy graduate. And I think the best thing for him to do is stay here. But, hey, personal reasons.

Q. (Indiscernible) 45 minutes (indiscernible). I didn't see Vince Davis at all?

COACH NARDUZZI: Yeah, we're just waiting for his results back from the COVID testing. And we actually got them back and he'll be out there tomorrow. You'll see the guy out there tomorrow.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

COACH NARDUZZI: But I will tell you this, Jerry -- might as well tell it like it is -- he should have been out there today. But his flight got delayed, Spirit Airlines and all that. Guess what? I could care less about excuses, so he's late. If he got here when he needed to, we would have got the results and he would have been ready to go. But because of that he missed practice. So he had to get tested.

Q. Linebackers (indiscernible) window, (indiscernible) Cam, Phil, Chase. How do you see that playing out

right now? And what's the strategy for playing these guys (indiscernible)?

COACH NARDUZZI: We coach them all the same. There's just little differences between each one of them. I think if you ever want to play at the next level it's good to be well versed in all of them. When you look at Cam Bright and Phil Campbell, they can both play to the field and to the boundary. Wendell and Chase Pine can play inside. Boss (phonetic) can play all three positions.

So, there's a lot of competition there at the linebacker spot. It's going to be -- I don't know how it's going to shake out. But certainly glad the majority of them are vaccinated and they're not going to have to miss practice for that. There's one thing you go, okay -- you miss 10 days, that's what I've said, you miss 10 days in this camp today, as we are with 123 players in camp, you're going to have a problem. Someone's going to run right by you. And that linebacker position's a competitive position. Got some good players on there.

John Petrishen, didn't mention him, you've got Petrishen. I think I mentioned everybody else. You've got Bangally Kamara. He's a football player. I'm looking forward to see what DeShields has got. And Leslie Smith is out there for the first time. I haven't seen him play football for a long time. If he stays healthy, he can stay in the mix.

Anytime you have that many linebackers, that means your special teams will pretty darned good, too, because there's been years where if you don't have linebackers and you're low on safeties, those are guys who make big time special teams players.

Q. How about the kickoff?

COACH NARDUZZI: Kickoff, I don't know. We'll find out. You haven't had a couple of returns for a while, so you're out. But I'd say Jaylon Barden will get some. Maybe Phil Campbell, some kickoff returns. Jordan Addison, of course. So we'll find out here during camp. We had a pretty good idea of what it was in spring. Those are some of the guys in spring ball.

Q. So, you'd have a linebacker returning kickoffs?

COACH NARDUZZI: No, but he's a tailback, too. That guy can play tailback, the way he runs. Couple weeks ago he was just running with the ball in a linebacker drill with some of our 30-minute sessions we had twice a week. I was like, jeez, we should put that guy on kickoff. I don't know if Coach Powell will. But you may see him out there. Who knows?

Q. In the spring, there was Matt, Carter and (indiscernible) fighting at tackle. Still the case today?

COACH NARDUZZI: Yeah, they're all fighting. There's one more here. Think who it is here -- and Branson Taylor. Branson with Goncalves and obviously Gabe Houy and Carter Warren are the four guys in that mix and all are fighting in there.

And obviously Carter Warren, because of his age and maturity at that position, and Gabe Houy -- Gabe Houy, if you look at him physically compared to where he was a year ago, he was coming off, I don't know if you knew it, he was coming off two shoulder surgeries going in a year ago going into the season. But right now it's, holy cow, he looks a lot different. And we hope that transfers out on the field.

Q. Damarri (indiscernible) --

COACH NARDUZZI: Damarri has looked great. He'll be in media day today. Take it easy on him. He's not a big media guy. Is he going to be there, E.J.? He's quiet, but Damarri is awesome. He had a great day today. Could have finished maybe two-minute with a pick-6, he's probably (indiscernible) -- but he made some strides through spring ball this summer. Just getting back into shape -- football shape. It's hard when you're out. He gave up boxing, and he should be ready to go.

Q. Why did he give up boxing?

COACH NARDUZZI: You never heard that? No one ever heard that story? So you know how kids are. Maybe you don't know. You have those boxing things, you punch the hands. It wasn't really in a ring or anything, but just sparring, I guess, and just working on your hand quickness and all that stuff in his front yard not with Coach Stacch.

Whether he missed or whatever. You talk to boxers, you can dislocate your shoulder from -- must have missed the hand I guess, I don't know. And that was COVID and boxing. What we dealt with last year. Pretty good corner. We're just getting him back into great football shape. We're happy where he is. Again, it was an innocent mistake. He's working to get better. He's just not allowed to box anymore.

Q. On the corners (indiscernible) where do you see that group? (Indiscernible) coming in?

COACH NARDUZZI: Yeah, it's a loaded group, when you watch an individual, it's like, holy cow who are all those guys over there. There's a lot of good young guys.

But you look at Damarri and Marquis and A.J. Woods, who's playing well. Got a lot of experience a year ago. Rashad Battle. Rashad Battle, kind of moved from safety to corner, so we'll give him a little bit of both. M.J. Devonshire is starting off at corner. He was at safety all spring. So we're teaching him both as well, trying to figure out what's the best fit is. I think both can play safety and both can play corner. So we'll just continue to work those guys in both positions, which just makes (indiscernible) smarter, a more well-rounded player. So you can get your best four or five on the field at one time.

Then the young guys, Khalil Anderson is a good player. I don't want to forget anybody. Noah Biglow has done some good things. Crumpley, when I get to watch the tape when I get out of here, I'll go right into tape just to watch and see it live. It's the first time I get to see these guys.

They've had great summers and they're working hard. And at the safety spot, Stephon Hall has been a guy that we want to look at for a long time. And Javon McIntyre as well. There's a lot of freshmen in the secondary that will have opportunities to come out and do something.

Q. I know you want to recruit in all areas, but what's a few top priorities for (indiscernible) this camp, if you had two or three in mind?

COACH NARDUZZI: As you started off with that question, the biggest thing critical to winning would be, is controlling the turnover game. We've got to win the turnover margin at every game. If we do that we'll have a chance to win. Defensively let's get them. Offensively, let's not give it to them.

We've got to hold onto the ball. We've got to get the ball back. When you have the ball on offense you have opportunities to score. When you don't have it and you give someone a short field you've got an issue there.

I'd say the second thing -- I'll leave it at two -- is running the football. We've got to somehow, some way become a lot better at running the game. You can all look at the tailback. It's everybody. I said it in the spring, I was impressed how our wide receivers went down the field and blocked. It's hard to break explosive runs when you don't go down and get those guys in the secondary, those four other guys.

It starts up front with the offensive line. It's got to take 11 guys -- that's why it's football; we're not in the Olympics. It's not a two-man volleyball game or the parallel bars by yourself. This is team football. It takes 11. It's not just one guy. In gymnastics it's one guy. In some of those other sports it's -- water polo, that's some team stuff there now.

So I mean just take it from the Olympics to team football. You need 11 guys to do their job every play.

Q. (Indiscernible), what stands out?

COACH NARDUZZI: What stands out? Everybody always talks about the Coastal but I look at the Coastal and go golly. You look at -- who is picked to win it on our side? North Carolina. And then you've got, who else, who is next? Virginia, Tech -- who? Miami.

We're picked fourth going into the season, which is great. Pick us eighth, whatever, tenth. And I just see a lot of competition, a lot of good football programs that are just going to keep going like this. It's an incredible conference and we've got a great commissioner in Jim Phillips. I'm excited about that.

I see a heck of a conference with a lot of great quarterbacks as we talked down (indiscernible) media day, there's a lot of returning starting quarterbacks. That's the big thing. You gotta go face King in Miami, the number one draft choice in North Carolina. There's some good players out there.

Q. Jordan, he's not catching anyone by surprise this year. They know what he is. How do you work with him to ensure he takes a step forward this year and not necessarily (indiscernible) his freshman year? And how could you guys schematically try and scheme him open when other teams are going to be honing in on him?

COACH NARDUZZI: First thing we won't do is tell them, hey, they're looking for you this year. We already mentioned that. He's already in, hey, you better improve. Don't have to mention that either, because he's already on that way. He's done that -- he's just a guy that likes to get better. He's a better communicator. He's better at everything he's done.

We have -- at team meetings this morning, he's speaking up. I didn't know if he knew how to talk last year coming out of camp. Now the guy's like this media darling.

He's gotten better in every respect. You can see it with your eyes what he's done. But that's coach's job. Last year he's a freshman, and you just want him to do that one thing. This year, we've got to be able to move him around, motion him and do different things so they can't find them. I don't know if there's a better guy to do that than Mark Whipple.

Q. (Indiscernible). How much do you expect to implement that schematically with Mark Whipple's?



COACH NARDUZZI: The go-go offense, I don't know what the go-go offense is. But Brennan is a smart guy. He's a great teacher. He's a great coach. And schematically he's got some good stuff. And we've obviously implemented some of it. Saw a little bit of it in the spring game.

And as the installs go, we'll see a little bit more of them. Again, a lot of it fits in with what we do already. It's not like this crazy stuff, but there's some little stuff that we can just tweak. And it's no different when you bring any coach in. What have they done in the past? What could we do better? Oh, I like that. That fits with this and it looks like that. And you try to make things look similar.

Q. (Indiscernible) improve the run game, as you said. Is it not just a personnel thing? Is it a schematic thing too?

COACH NARDUZZI: No doubt about it, schemes always go into it. And it's also what can your guys do. The tight ends, we talk about O line and receivers, but the tight ends are critical whether it's in a go-go offense or the whip-whip offense, whatever it is. But you can do anything you want with that.

Q. (Indiscernible) as a whole, with Brendan Malone (phonetic), what can you work on specifically to fight through tactics, (indiscernible) four guards (indiscernible)?

COACH NARDUZZI: It's funny you ask that, but we do some drills. But we're just working individual drills where we can -- nobody wants to get anybody hurt. Nobody gets scared to do too much but it's a physical game. And the kids have to have confidence.

When they see, like, man, I could have scored a touchdown -- everybody wants to score. And we've got a trip and fall down videotape of our guys doing that. I tried to fix it midseason. Everybody is looking at me like I'm crazy. I did some studying and in the spring we did some stuff just throwing bags at the kids. And they love it. Coach, give me some more; I need that again. They want it.

And so it's those little things that you might not have seen a drill, may have never done it before. But it doesn't matter. Just because we didn't do it before doesn't mean we can't do it now. It's changing and evolving and learning new things and trying as a coach fix what's broken.

We fell down. You go to North Carolina State, DJ Turner, a great player with the Raiders now, he trips and falls going into the end zone at the 1-yard line and we don't score.

That's the game.

We've got to score touchdowns. And that happened a lot. You guys can probably pull up your own little video of it, but happened too much. And to me that's partly coaching and getting guys that can make plays when the ball's in their hands, that want to score. But we have to teach them how to do it so they have confidence when someone heel clicks them and they don't go down.

Q. Last year, (indiscernible), Calijah Jordan. How have you seen them progress from being (indiscernible) starters now sophomore this level of expectation taking on those challenges?

COACH NARDUZZI: You said Calijah. Who is the other one?

Q. Jordan.

COACH NARDUZZI: It's been a long time since spring ball. So I'm looking at one practice and haven't watched it yet. Both of them have matured. That's the first thing. Off the field, on the field, I expect them both to be better players on the field. That's a must.

But I've seen both of them mature off the field. That's what I see them more of, because I see them more in this building than on the field, just because we haven't been out there.

Calijah is a different guy. He's bigger -- both of them are bigger, stronger, faster. And I don't use it as a cliché. It's a fact. And they're more mature.

As you talk to Calijah and Jordan -- and you'll get a chance to talk to them today -- it's a different bird out there right now.

Q. You mentioned Jim Phillips earlier. Job of the conference commissioner (indiscernible) everything that's going on with football. What are your thoughts where this board is, where it's going and how you see (indiscernible)?

COACH NARDUZZI: I really don't -- I haven't really worried too much about where the ACC is situated. I think it's a great conference. I think we're right where we need to be. I'm glad he's our commissioner. And I think he's detailed in everything. Any meeting I've ever had with the guy is detailed. I don't have to call him up, say, commissioner, how is it going, are we okay? Like, I know we're good. You've got confidence because you've watched him work. You've been in plenty of Zooms with him.

I get more e-mails and text messages and communications from him than I've ever got in a long time, six years, and it's been really refreshing.

So you look at all the chaos around, we know there's going to be ripple effects. What's it going to be? I don't know.

I'm not going to sit here and speculate on August 6 or whatever the date is today on where it's going. But kind of how things go. You wish things wouldn't be backdoor, like they were. You don't know what happened, what really happened in the background there. But teams make decisions on what they have to do, where they want to go. And there will be more to come, that's for sure.

Q. The other day you talked about (indiscernible), cheating, asking for some more regulations in place. Talk about specifically what you think you would like to see happen (indiscernible)?

COACH NARDUZZI: I feel like I'm back at ACC Media Day. I appreciate you bringing me back to the past. But there needs to be regulation. I think this whole Name Image and Likeness got pushed on the NCAA a lot faster than they expected it to or wanted it to.

The NCAA drug their feet and the states went ahead of them. They're sitting there going, now what do we do? And I don't think -- there's got to be some guidelines, like everything in this, guidelines. You all have guidelines on where you can go. They don't let Jerry go down to Charlotte. Everybody has guidelines and things they can and can't do.

But there's got to be some type of parameters put around this thing or it's just, like I said, it's not good. And there's got to be some type of regulation in the whole Name, Image and Likeness. Can't go crazy.

Q. Do you need to know exactly what it should be or --

COACH NARDUZZI: I don't have any ideas. I don't have time to worry about that. That's what the NCAA is hopefully they're doing. I think they've got a meeting set up. They need to act quick. It could get out of control before they even know it. I've heard coaches out there say there's no NCAA right now. What are they going to do? They can't control anything right now. That's not good. That's not good for anybody. It needs to get regulated pretty quick. And there's got to be some guidelines.

Q. How are the guys handling it?

COACH NARDUZZI: I'm really happy. I haven't had to

have many meetings. The guys are good. They're worried about the team and the '21 season. And that's side noise. I think they're focused where they need to be.

If you become a great player, have opportunities like Kenny's got, then all the power to you. I love it. I'm glad our players have that opportunity. I think it's outstanding. They should get paid more. I wish -- one thing nobody ever talks about is we have what we call a stipend, cost of attendance stipend. I won't tell you what it is, but it's pretty nice, a year, for our kids.

But they've got extra money. It's not like they get -- back in the day we got our tuition paid for. Here's your dorm, here's your keys, and here's where you're going to eat. Get your tray, go through the line and get your food. That's what it was. And that's where it ended.

As a matter of fact, I think we got our books. And again six, seven years ago that ended. As a matter of fact, probably when I came here, there's a thing called cost of attendance. Like I said, I'm not going to put our number out there, but I would say it's one of the top in the country as far as the money we get our kids to go.

When you talk about image and likeness, we could have very easily said, hey, we're going to double that money. Let's just do that. And I don't know why we don't do that. But triple it. I don't care what you do. But give everybody the same. But our locker room has been good. I don't see any ripple effect from that.

Q. Question about freshman D line.

COACH NARDUZZI: After one day I couldn't tell you that. I may tell you something different tomorrow, after I watch tape. But they're out there wearing shorts. What the NCAA allows us to do, one of the best thing they did, is we have spider pads on, like having a couple balloons on your shoulders. They don't pop, though. Some thick balloons on your shoulders, to protect our kids a little bit, which they've never done before.

But they did allow us to go out in helmets and spider pads. No thigh boards. And again it's a major protection thing. We've been begging for years to get that just to protect our kids. We're not going out there live tackling anybody with a balloon on their shoulder.

When you look at it, Elliot Donald is a guy that's studied the game. And Dorien Ford, they're two of the guys inside that have a shot. And look at Nahki, who was here for spring ball. He was the lone D lineman that came in with spring ball that -- he's got a spring on his belt, has a chance to play for us because I've seen 15 practices of his.

We'll find out what Elliot and Dorian have inside. But both are athletic. We'll find out when pads come on. And Naquan Brown is here, 210 pounds. He's athletic and can run. We'll soon find out what he has for this season.

Q. Injuries?

COACH NARDUZZI: We're pretty solid. Bumps and bruises coming out of conditioning, but we're pretty good.

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