

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Couldn't be more excited. Feels like normal. Got the media in here. We're not Zooming. A lot of excitement. Kids are popping around this morning, a lot of excitement out of our kids to get this season going. It's been a long time since we've had some normalcy and so we are excited to play against somebody else instead of ourselves.

We had a great preseason camp. Really happy with where we are as a program and as a football team right now offensively, defensively and special teams. There will be a lot of things we'll find out on Saturday at 4:00 PM that maybe we didn't go during camp.

I think once the lights turn on, a lot of things happen and you know, we'll figure out some more things two-deep wise on that day and see how guys respond and how they play.

As far as UMASS, good football team. I know you guys will look, go, oh, they only played four games last year, 0-4, they have 12 new transfers on the football team from all over the place, two from North Carolina. So it's a totally different football team. It's not like you're going to see the same team we saw last year.

They had a spring like we did. I think they feel like they reloaded, and have some guys that can play. So it's going to be a challenge and you don't know what you're looking at. You have guys that played down at Texas Tech and North Texas, UNC, Arkansas, a couple junior college guys, so we know how the portal is. You can get filled up pretty good in the portal, not just recruit a bunch of high school kids, especially with where they were last year.

So Walt Bell is the head coach there, known him for a couple years, he was at Maryland, was at Florida State. So he's been around. He's probably going to call the plays, we assume. He'll be the guys making the calls. So he's head coach, offensive coordinator and that's why he's a head coach because he's got a great offensive mind.

And Tommy Restivo is their defensive coordinator. Been down at South Carolina State and been at UMass since



2019, kind of a guru. But they also have another guru in Jim Reid, BC last four or five years, heck of a coach, coached against him when he was at Richmond and I was at Rhode Island a long time ago, an old coach at UMASS years ago. So a guy that's got a feel for UMass and again I think he's a great football coach that will help out on defense tremendously for the defensive coordinator, so that's a guy I'm sure they will lean on.

So we will see some new things from BC as far as what they do on defense. Tyler Lytle, the transfer quarterback from Colorado is probably going to be their signal caller. So that's a guy that -- there's not a whole lot of tape to look at from out of Colorado but 6-5, moves well and makes good decisions from what we can gather from various intels. But you don't see a lot on tape and so we'll find out Saturday what they look like and who they have got and the jersey numbers they have on the field. Questions?

Q. Who will be the linebackers?

PAT NARDUZZI: I really can't tell you. We feel really good with all of them. You know, it's going to be -- Wendell is a good football player and so Shabazz (ph). It's a good problem, any time you see more -- we are going to play them all and who is going to start next week might be based on how they play next week.

I couldn't tell you who is going to start. We'll find out who picks up the game plan, who practices better this week. Nice as a head coach to be able to do that as a defensive coordinator or offensive coordinator and say, hey, we'll find out at the end of the week. It's good motivation, whether Shabazz (ph) lines up at mike or Wendell or Chase Pine for that matter, we feel good with all three of them.

It's a great problem to have, and then if one gets in the game, that's not as good you have the guy that you can put in. We have not always been in that situation, so to me, ors in 2021 compared to ors back three years ago are totally different.

And I can tell you what position is an or, or I don't know, or hey, we feel good with each one of them. For the most part, I can say pretty much feel same thing about the tailback position. We'll find out guys, who has the hot hand which we are always going to do.



So there's a lot of positions you feel good. D-tackle, we have got six guys that can really play. I mean, I don't care which one goes out there. Jules was looking good, he looked good in two-deep and he's never been in two-deep ever. He's done some good things and I'm excited about that guy a lot.

There's ors, and I don't know if there's ors -- I could have put ors on every one of them because I feel good with all those guys.

Q. Where is the tailback? Do you run each guy in a series?

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say probably play it by series a little bit. It's Monday at 12:05. Depends how they practice this week. Maybe it's two series. I know if I was a linebacker, I'll just go back, I have a good series and take them out, next series I'm upset, that's not good. You like to get in the flow of the game but when you have got so many good tailbacks, maybe we'll throw two or three in there at the same time, who knows.

Q. Finishing camp and the guys that are behind --

PAT NARDUZZI: Haba had a great camp, maybe the best there, even as good as Deslin I guess. So Haba looks good and we're excited about where he is. John Morgan has had a nice camp. He had a great final scrimmage which I was waiting to see because he practices his tail off during the week.

I don't even know who else we have at the defensive end spot and then day I don't know, day I don't know has been good. He missed a couple days a week ago but we expect him to be full go and start off this week right where he left off.

Q. Do you have a plan for --

PAT NARDUZZI: No.

Q. -- or not know which guy you want?

PAT NARDUZZI: Right now, I don't know. That's one of them bad ors I guess. I'd say it's a bad or right now. It's always like, some of those ors, it's by design and we have got good, but right there I think we are both solid.

I can tell you this: We are hitting about 70 percent over if you looked at the long range of camp but then when you look at the last five days, they are probably hitting at 83, 84 percent. So they both get better together. You wish one guy was at 50 and one guy was at 80 and you say, okay, it's easy but it's a hard decision and they both deserve to

kick to be honest with you.

The last five days, they are like I said, hitting over 80 percent, which is about where Kessman was a year ago. I think Kessman a year ago coming out of camp was like 86 percent. It's just going to be -- we have got all kinds of different ideas but we haven't nailed down one.

Q. Will you get aggressive on your play calling?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't call the offensive plays. Never have. Never will. But Whipple will probably be a little bit different, imagine, knowing he's a conservative guy and knows he had Kessman and now he doesn't have Kessman. All along I'd like to be aggressive and go with seven all the time.

But I can understand, points are points and being smart and all that. But we'll be okay and I trust both those kicker when is we do line them up, we're going to put it through the upright.

Q. With the quarterbacks, how does he look...

PAT NARDUZZI: He looks so much more comfortable, patient. Again, it's not like his arm is so much better or he runs better. It's just his comfort in the pocket, I would say. The way he's looking at coverages and how relaxed he looks. I think in your freshman year, stuff is moving really fast and you go to your sophomore year and it's still moving pretty quick.

Right now things are really slow. It looks like DBs and linebackers are moving in mud out there. He's just making great decisions and he can see it all now which I think in another year, another two years in the NFL is just going to help him. He just has a really good vibe about him right now and there's just calm in the pocket and that's what I love to see.

Q. Last year there were times when maybe your best option was to run the ball, do you need to be smarter about those decisions?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes, we're not going to run them. We are not a quarterback run team as you know anyway. If he has got to scramble, he has to scramble but we'd rather throw it to guys that are paid to catch the ball and run with it. That's something that I think he'll be better about doing.

Q. Have you heard anything from Coach Whipple about facing UMass for the first time?

PAT NARDUZZI: If there; he's not going to be the type of guy, oh, can't wait to play him. It's probably like me playing

Youngstown State, one of those same things that you can never let your emotions get ahold of you. Obviously we all know, in every profession, it's natural, it's human that you want to go do that but you know, the emotions won't get into the game.

Q. Given the experience -- what has pushed Erick?

PAT NARDUZZI: Again, it's a good thing. Rashad is big and athletic and Rashad could be out starting at corner right now. He's a team player and understands that position -- and having one guy, but two that you feel comfortable there and you feel comfortable because he's done it in a game and you know what's going on. Our offense throws so much at our defense during fall camp that it's kind of hard to put it together.

So we are looking forward to see what Rashad does in game play where, this is what we are going to do. During camp they have this humongous package on defense and it really is big and now it's going to scrunch down and we're not going to have to worry about some of the things that we worry about in camp which will make it even easier on Rashad. We are looking forward to a great week out of him and playing both of those guys, keeping them fresh and finding out what both of them are going to do on the hash.

Q. Will you use true freshmen off the bench?

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say that would be my guess. True freshman, I would say yes.

Q. Too much or bring them back --

PAT NARDUZZI: Would I like a bit of, not vanilla, how about butter pecan. I want to have some nuts in it. It's not going to be vanilla. We are going to play and see what we got and if you ever get bored, bring me a little cup of butter pecan, that would be good.

Q. (Off mic.)

PAT NARDUZZI: He's explosive, and M.J. Devonshire can be a punt returner as well. We hope to see a couple guys go in there and try it and see what they do. But you know, Jaylon is an athletic guy. He's got some juice to him and we're excited about watching him go.

Q. Can he play both?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, he can play both. He can play both, field or boundary, something to figure out this week. That's ease.

Q. Is there an aspect of your program that's come a long way?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know, that's your job to figure out what it is. I would say just our football team. I think just the depth. Roster management, to me is critical. The culture here I think is great and that's why we've got guys that stick it out and play and guys that comeback and play fifth year or sixth year or seventh year for Tipton (ph).

I think that's the key is having enough depth to be able to do what we do. So I would say culture and roster management as far as keeping them and not being weak at one position or another. Having enough guys that can compete at a position.

Q. Are you looking after the non-conference schedule?

PAT NARDUZZI: We are just looking at one at a time but definitely having some non-conference games helps. It's not going to change how we do things or what we do. There's the vanilla ice cream that Mangieri likes, but when you go just to vanilla ice cream, you don't get to get much flavor. Your kids aren't getting better at it, either. So to me, you know, a little bit of chocolate, maybe chocolate pecan, who knows, I don't know if they make it. We'll have a little bit of different flavors and we need to work at if we're going to put something new and we're going to spring it in the opener.

Q. Being one of the top coaches here for so many years, what does that mean to you personally?

PAT NARDUZZI: Means I like Pittsburgh. Doesn't matter. It's one year at a time. I don't look at the years, and it's nice. It's great to be here. But you know, in this profession, you never know. That's the first thing.

It's just one game at a time, one year at a time and worry about next year, doesn't matter about the first six. It's about this year and just coaching football.

Q. Christmas 2014 to 2021.

PAT NARDUZZI: It's an accomplishment. I think it's hard to be a head coach that many years. It's hard. It's not easy to continue to do the same things, but whatever.

Q. (Off-mic.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I think so. You guys can add them up. Go like this -- and again, it's a two-way street, do you want to stay or do you want to go or do you have to go. There's a little bit of both. Guys jump ship and go, as you guys



know what's happened here in the past, guys taking different jobs. It's a two-way street. I love Pittsburgh and enjoy working with our kids and our staff and our people.

Q. Talk about the three-way battle at tackle.

PAT NARDUZZI: Experience probably. Matt is a little bit younger and Branson Taylor is right there, too. He's a guy that just keeps getting better. He's a baby. The older they get, the more mature they get and if Carter and Gabe are gone in a year, which they have another year left but if they are gone in a year, you're going to feel pretty good in another year and getting valuable reps last year during COVID helped Matt get his feet wet and Branson got in some tight end, unbalanced looks or extra tackle stuff. So that helped hip and he'll keep getting better.

Q. Anything that stood out on special teams, kick coverage, punt coverage?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's hard to n practice to really tell. We'll find out on game day. You're to the going live. You're afraid go get somebody hurt on kickoff, kickoff return, punt team.

But when you look at specialists covering kicks, most important thing is who is going to cover kickoffs and who is going to cover and make plays on the punt team, and the rest is your return game and blocking people. So the guys that will show up are guys that can make tackles inside the 20-yard line on kickoffs and who does a great job of covering punts.

Q. Safe to assume it's higher than that now -- what were the nature of discussions with kids that might be in that last four percent?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm worried about winning football games right now. We are right there as far as the percentage goes and maybe a little better and at the end the guy the just have to figure it out. The good thing is we are in a good spot as far as that goes and you know sometimes you just kind of give up. So I've given up on the last, whatever, five percent, whatever it is, and focus on game week.

Q. Good not to have to wear the mask?

PAT NARDUZZI: Shield is fogging up, no doubt, that's the best. One of the things I'm looking forward to the most is being able to sit next to Larry on my radio show and not across the room. Not having to wear a mask to go to the radio show. There's so many -- golly, it's beautiful.

Q. Off mic.

PAT NARDUZZI: Patience is the key. I mean, you know, I'll just point out some guys that again I'm going to miss somebody. Young guys, don't get mad when I miss somebody but Noah Bigelow, Khalil Anderson, Crumpley, those guys in the back, and McIntyre, Javon McIntyre is a guy that can show up whether special teams or in another couple week when is they start to really gel. Nahki Johnson, watch out. He might not be in the two-deep right now but he's a guy that I see in the future.

Jaden Bradley, wide out, that guy is a football player. Coach Whipple sent him down to the scout field yesterday because he kept jumping. The guy loves football. He's jumping in taking Jared Wayne's reps, that guy is just dying to get in there. He loves football and he's going to be a good football player in this conference, and he'll play this year, I have no doubts, as long as he stays patient.

Rodney Hill [sic] is another one of those guys that's a good football player. Probably missed some guys. So, whatever.

Q. Your depth chart, the offensive program --

PAT NARDUZZI: Bob is a true legends, that guy strolls around at practice every day. He's got energy every day. You know, for me primarily not as a football coach but as a person in this office, he has got the greatest personality, recruits love him, the kids love him. He's exactly what you need. You need Coach Junko in this office and he means the world to this program, everybody in this program. Everybody knows who he is and what he's all about.

Q. Talking about Kenny, what about the guys around him? How do you feel about the depth at receiver and the focus this year on tight end?

PAT NARDUZZI: We have to keep our tight ends healthy. I feel good about where our tight end room is and Gavin has been solid. Feel great with the depth at the wide-out position, really do. We have some guys that can stroll in there and keep guys fresh that are running fast, so feel good there. Feel okay at the O-line depth. We have to stay healthy there, not as many as I'd like to be loaded up with.

I can tell you this: The Ryan Jacoby kid has been a really good addition. He's going to be a really good football player. Maybe in a couple weeks, he gets eligible, he's still learning the offense but we're excited where he is.

Q. Guard?

PAT NARDUZZI: He can be guard or tackle.



