

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: You guys ready to roll? All right.

It's been a long time really. We had the beautiful press conference. Seems like forever since we played Georgia Tech. That's way beyond.

I guess to close a chapter with you guys, again, good win on the road, good team win. We started fast, which was our goal going down there. We won the turnover ratio. Our guys played hard, played strong and played fast, which is the goal every week to get our guys to stay consistent and play like they did against a good football team.

Still got a long ways to go as far as where we want to be, what we want to do. So many corrections from that game and every game, to be honest with you, we just try to continue to get better. That's what we good in did the open week, try to fix some of the things we want to get better at, look at ourselves, self-scout-wise, what are they doing, what are we doing.

A lot of teams go out and copycat what they have seen in the past. We expect to see some of that. Virginia Tech will certainly look at where our weaknesses are. Then we have a great Virginia Tech team that has a tough loss, emotional loss to Notre Dame at home.

Tough to go on the road anywhere. We've struggled down in Blacksburg. Whether it's four downs from the one one year, two years ago in the pouring down rain, Bud Foster's last game there. They played well. We didn't play so well.

It's a great challenge for us to go on the road again and play a tough football team. Justin Fuente has a tough football team, they play hard. They play tough. On offense they like to run the ball. On defense line up in four down, play a lot of man free. Again, very athletic football team, something that we have to come ready to play.

On the other note, besides offense, defense, special teams, they got one of the best special teams units in the ACC. They got the number one ranked special teams unit



when you take them all into consideration.

We're going to have to play our A game. Special teams is going to be a critical, critical role this weekend. We definitely have to get better there and impact the game on special teams.

Questions.

Q. (Question about reviewing tape.)

PAT NARDUZZI: What I see on tape, they love to run the football. They love to run it against us as well, especially when we get into our three down stuff. Check the run. See us putting in that sub nickel package, love to run the ball on third-and-long, third-and-medium.

When you look at what you saw against Notre Dame, they like to run the quarterbacks. They got two quarterbacks banged up. Burmeister will be ready to go. Came back in the game, looked like he hurt his funny bone. Didn't look like it affected him much. So he'll be back. We expect to see him.

Again, they like to run the quarterback. That's what happens sometimes when you do that. I don't know how much quarterback run we'll see. Maybe see some wildcat, try to make up some stuff, last couple days of what they could possibly do, putting somebody else back there to run what they want to run.

But they run hard and they make plays.

Q. Where do you think your defense is right now in terms of stopping the big plays?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's hit-and-miss. You work so hard. Last year they lined up in a three-by-one with a closed end, they ran one quarterback lead zone. We came up and stopped it. They ran a quarterback lead, quarterback step back, they ran an over route which we didn't play great. A big pass on us a couple years ago down there. As a matter of fact two years ago they hit us on a spread out over-route. We were in cover three, which would have been pretty good, but we played it like cover four, which is an issue.

We have to eliminate the explosives. You get graded



game by game. I don't want to say they've always tricked you, but last year even one of their bigger plays was they came out, we call it the 'fight song' where they put an eligible tight end at the tackle position, try to trick you. The backer saw it. We just didn't cover it properly. They've always seemed to try to get one or two of them on you a game. We have to eliminate the big plays, for sure.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Seems like we see more of it than you see in other games. It's a Fuente, it's an offensive coordinator, what they do. Trying to make explosives, trying to create stuff. Sometimes we create our own problems, too.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, we weren't too banged up going into the open week. Yeah, gave us a week to get fresh more than healthy, just mentally. The kids had Friday, Saturday off, they could just kind of chill. Some of them went home and got to relax a little bit. It's a mental break as much as a physical break and getting healthy.

Q. All the guys that have been on the team for a while now, is there an extra emphasis to get a win at Blacksburg?

PAT NARDUZZI: No doubt about it. I think Notre Dame found out it's not an easy place to go play. It's loud. Fans are into it. They'll be into it at 3:30, 7:30. With the 3:30 game on ESPN, they'll be ready to go. They'll be pumped up.

Again, it's not an easy place to play. We got a little used to that. Even Georgia Tech was a good crowd. Obviously Tennessee on the road. We've kind of gone through those issues already, so it's not going to be new to us.

You see some teams on TV where they struggle with the noise, the crowd, jump off-sides on offense, all that stuff. We didn't do that down in Tennessee. Don't expect to do it in Blacksburg this weekend. Well-coached. Just got to go out and execute and make plays.

Q. How do you feel about the offensive line?

PAT NARDUZZI: We got to win. That's how you feel about it. I was happy with what they did. We ran the ball pretty darn good, if I can recall. They protected the quarterback. I think we gave up one sack. It really was a protection issue than a personnel issue. We gave up the one.

They brought a blitz we couldn't get out of that protection. Just got to be careful. Wish would have checked out of it.

Q. (Indiscernible) you see him taking serious steps up as far as playing more as the lead running back?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, I think that's definitely something you got to look at. We got a lot of confidence in Vince. He's become that next guy. We've been rotating them. I think you're going to see both.

Again, I think you see, did he have good plays, get lucky? We're just going to continue. We need two to begin with. We're not going to say, You're our guy, and the backup is going, I'm not going to get any reps. All of a sudden he's got to go in.

We're going to keep those guys fresh. Issy and Vince have done a great job of protecting the quarterback. That's a critical thing you don't see. People are looking at rushing yards and carries. Protecting the quarterback is just as important as running with the football. They've done a great job of that, too.

Q. National notoriety the last couple weeks. How do you see those guys handling that?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know. Sometimes it's one thing we struggle with, handling success. National notoriety as far as just an individual player or a team. I still don't see much respect for a 4-1 football team, which is fine. It's something I'll use.

All the pre-season ratings and all that baloney doesn't make any difference. It's what you do week in, week out. No one cares what you did the last couple weeks, everybody cares what you're going to do Saturday at 3:30. I think that is the focus. Our guys have to take it one game at a time, not worry about the noise on the outside, what you guys are talking about, what the national media is talking about. It doesn't matter because you're only as good as your last opportunity on the field.

Q. (Question about social media.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Social media, they look at it. They've had two weeks to look at it. Look at me, all that stuff. You try to tell them to shut it off, turn it off. Do they? I don't know. Hopefully they will.

We had a good week of practice last week. We'll have a tough practice this week. We're going to get after it.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I've been happy with Erick Hallett. He played well. Brandon Hill has played well. Those two guys have come in and have played solid football.

Last year in this game at home, they kind of attacked our safeties. We had Brandon Hill and Erick both started. Seemed like we put Damar into the boundary, Hallett in the field. They went after Hallett when we had to switch them. They didn't know where they were.

But Hallett is a much different player than he was a year ago. He's improved greatly. Then having Brandon in there, I forget why Brandon wasn't out there last year, forget exactly why, but he didn't play last year. I'm sure he's looking forward to it.

He's been a big hitter, guy we can count on. Both those guys are guys we can count on, our two best safeties.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: He is. He has been just a little bit banged up. Rashad is coming along, but it's hard to come along as far as much as you want to when you are not practicing as much as you need to. I think that is a concern there. Again, nothing major, just little knickknack things which caused him not to practice as much, get as good as you need to get.

Q. Big picture view, Virginia Tech, '16, '17. Get down to the one yard line at the end. The next year. Came up pretty good last year. Do you look at the overall series?

PAT NARDUZZI: You do. It's been a long time we played Virginia Tech. We've got a five-game breakdown on them, just Pitt versus Virginia Tech. We've watched a lot of those five games through the last week.

You do look at it. We got to play better on the road, come ready to play in that atmosphere. That will be the challenge this week. But we definitely look at all that stuff, what they've done, how they've done things. We got to start fast down there. We got to get ahead of the crowd.

Q. When you said you self-scout, looking for some of those weaknesses, what are some of the things that stood out with your offense?

PAT NARDUZZI: I haven't watch much. I'll let Coach Whip take care of that. I focus on defense, to be honest with you, this week. I focus on them during the week, how we're practicing, what plays we're running. I can't tell you I've studied a lot. I've watched one game on them, Virginia Tech's defense, just to see who their people are. I'll let

maybe one of the offensive coaches talk to you during the week later about that.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Defensively, you know, obviously we know the one issue we have with RPOs. I think we've tightened down some of that stuff, changed things up that we are doing. Those guys like to run RPOs as well. We'll see the same slant route that other people run. It's kind of the en vogue new RPO. Used to be RPOs were all going out, now they're all coming in as far as in routes.

They will run some skinny posts on the outside, run something we call glances, run some dragons or slants inside. Backer gets sucked up, so the safety now on the RPO has to play the outs and the ins. It's not easy. We got different things in to take care of that stuff. We've been tested a little bit. We'll continue to be tested.

Q. (Question about trying to expose the middle of the field.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Right. Again, it's RPOs. You either stay out of the box and let them run them down it down your throat or you step in the box, stop the run, let them throw it over your head. We have other little tweakings to our defense that we got to take care of where we make sure we're good in the run, still keep that backer out of the box.

Those are all little things we've worked on the last three weeks and gotten a little bit better at.

Q. How important is it to have a senior quarterback in those environments?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's big-time. I mean, he's one of the top quarterbacks in the country, if not the best quarterback in the country, in my opinion, when you look around.

It's comforting as a head coach, as an offense and defense, knowing that Kenny Pickett is going to lead the show out there. You know you can trust him, he's going to do everything he can do to win a football game. Have a lot of faith.

Talking to him yesterday. He has a great grasp of what they do and how they do it. 95% of the room watched the TV game without it being set up. They kind of got a good feel of what they're going into. They got an extra week to see what Virginia Tech is offensively, defensively and in special teams.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: He was 100% healthy in practicing I guess week two. That was his first time. Deslin is getting to the point where he got through all his camp reps. You think of a Tuesday practice, a Wednesday practice, he's been using those the last few weeks just to get back to playing the game of football. He just didn't do it during camp. Had an injury obviously in spring ball, at the end of spring ball, that held him out. He did an unbelievable job of recovering from that. Just took a little longer than we wanted it to. But even was ahead of schedule with what he had to deal with there.

He's been playing great. (Indiscernible) has been playing great, been playing lights out as well. Des has been playing solid. I know he wants more. He misses three sacks against Georgia Tech. He could be the hero, ACC defensive end of the week if he makes those three. I know that upsets him. He's driven to fix that stuff. You got to love that. He works his tail off, kind of like Rashad Weaver, Patrick Jones, Deslin as far as the mental part of it. He will be on top of his stuff. He knows what's coming at him.

I think we talked earlier in the year as far as game one, game two, thinking too much. We got rid of thinking too much in play, but thing enough to go make plays.

Q. How is Kenny handling all the attention?

PAT NARDUZZI: Kenny is like this. You don't see any change in who he is. That's good. I think you handle it week by week and see how it affects him. I don't expect to see any difference in how Kenny Pickett plays.

Q. (Question about the hype.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Quite often. Few times a week, for sure, to the team. It's all about that. Again, whether it's on the field or off the field, it's we, we, not me, me, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Helps out a lot. Although I'd love the combination of Kradel, (indiscernible), Matt. Whatever that combination is, just glad he didn't have any snap issues, any issues with that little injury he had. He's back 100% now. It's good to have him back. We got answers if something were to occur at that position.

Q. A.J.?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'd say he's probably about 90%. He's coming back. Been awhile, though. He's back to doubles, too. He has to get back to business.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Appears to be, right? I feel good with where he is. Kicked a 46-yarder against Georgia Tech on the road. Sam has been playing well. He has a lot of confidence. Amazing how consistent some of these guys are. More of the consistency as far as how they act.

Kenny Pickett, Jordan Addison, Sam. If I took a heartbeat on that guy, I don't know if it's a 58 yard line field goal or extra point, his heartbeat doesn't change. Same with Kenny, Jordan. They always go to cool school, relax, just play football. I've been happy with Sam.

Q. What has he done differently this year? Is it an attitude thing?

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, last year he was a true freshman. We put him in one spot. We just kind of -- even though we wanted to move him around. Now we get to move him around a little bit. He's playing with a lot of confidence. We know he is a great player. He knows he's a great player. You got to go out and make great plays. He actually didn't have one of his better games. I think he put the ball on the ground twice as far as catches. He would like to be 100% efficient on catches that come his way on target.

He's steady, he's fast, he runs great routes. He knows what he's doing. He doesn't have to think about what route he's running, how he is converting a route. He knows and he plays fast.

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