

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Not an easy place to play, as we talked already, I don't want to go back and repeat things I said. Our players played hard, they were coachable and we closed a chapter and moving on to Clemson. And a lot of things we did good in that game, and a lot of things we did bad in that game, and a lot of corrections we need to make before this weekend's game.

And we have to learn from our mistakes, and I think that's what -- you know, you have got to learn from him and he's got to learn from this guy. We can't go make the same mistakes with a different guy; well, that's the first time I did that. No. They have got to learn from each other's mistakes and I think that's one of the things we talked about last night.

So Clemson, you know, coming into town for the first time. Feel like they are in our division. Played them, this will be the fourth time in seven seasons. It's like Syracuse; they are a crossover team, it seems like. Obviously a great football team, and I know they are not top in the country right now, but that doesn't determine what kind of football team they have got. They are talented. You're looking at I think the top scoring defense in the country. They are playing fantastic.

Venables has got them going on defense and offense, they obviously missing Trevor Lawrence, I think a lot, but they still got a ton of players on the field. Got a lot of guys that make plays that scare the heck out of you. And all it takes is one play in this series and one play in that series, and that's all they need is explosives. They have had explosives against us before and we have to eliminate those and play great defense.

And it will be the best challenge our offense has had all year going up against that defense. They are really good. So with that, open it up for questions.

Q. You mentioned Trevor Lawrence. What have you seen out of D.J.?

PAT NARDUZZI: Again they missed him; takes time to



develop a guy, okay. You look at D.J., where he is now compared to where Kenny was as a freshman or a sophomore and there's always going to be growing pains and we are going to miss Kenny in a year, okay, so it will be the same, who is going to be the guy who takes time to get in there. Every week you see improvement No. 1, you see them do things and evolve in some of the things they are doing. They are just getting him comfortable, and they are still finding ways to win.

Dabo is a winner. Clemson is a winner. They find ways to win. You ain't getting any style points, but you know what, you just get the win. They find a way to get it done and that's the most impressive thing is they find a way different to win every weekend and again, playing championship defense.

Q. Same schemes?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, you see the same stuff. They do a lot of stuff. They do a great job of game plan. You are going to see binds, we are going to see crack-and-goes. We've seen one last two years. I may jump off the stadium after the game if they hit another crack-and-go on us. I mean, there's things that they consistently do through games, you kind of know. We obviously didn't do a good job a year ago defending them. Tony does a great job. You know, I mean, they do a good job of putting the players in position to make plays, and they have got to make them. So he's one of the best.

Q. What makes them so good?

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, talent. It starts with talent. Schemes are schemes. But talent wins football games. Talent, you've got to have talent. It never comes down to the X & O's. It comes down to the guys out there making plays.

And again, Brett Venables is a heck of a defensive coordinator. So he gives them that. He's an emotional guy. They play with emotion. They play with effort. They get after it, and again, they are just well-prepared. They are smart.

And it starts with their middle linebacker, No. 47. He seems like he's been there longer than Tre Tipton. He just continues to keep coming up, I don't know how many more



years he's got left, but he's the computer of their defense. He gets it going and he gets them lined up and they know what's going on. They check a lot of things to formations, and it's something we have to do a good job of game planning on the other side of the ball.

Q. On the defensive end, how much have you heard at all from those guys, wanting to rectify that?

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, we wanted to rectify last week. There's always unfinished business. We beat Virginia Tech the week before, but last time -- last two times we have been down there. So whatever they want to use for their motivation, doesn't matter.

We have to go out and execute this week in practice. We have to know what we are doing. They have to know what they are doing. We have to play football. What happened in the past happened in the past. I'm not talking much about last year or the year before or the Championship Game. Doesn't really matter. We just have to go out and play football.

We're a different football team than we were a year ago. They are a different football team than they were a year ago. They have a lot of great football players, a lot of superstars, a lot of four- and five-star players, and we are going to have matchups. So it's an opportunity for our guys to go play against the best, and they are the best. They are still the gauge in the ACC, period. They are the best.

Q. That being said, you guys are actually favored in this game. I know you're not -- from a perception standpoint, how important is this week as opposed to -- last time you were up here -- now you're favored against the favorites in the ACC?

PAT NARDUZZI: I have no idea. I don't care about favorites and points and spread and all the rest of it. Doesn't really matter in my opinion. They are favored coming into our house again. We haven't had success the last two outings.

You know, I mean, I don't know who makes those decisions. I don't know what they look at. I don't know anything. I just know they are a really good football team and we are going to have to play our best to have a chance to win.

Q. What's the edict, the trouble with consistency, to be able to hand the success better?

PAT NARDUZZI: Nothing, I have no idea. I mean, I don't care -- I told them last night I don't care about stats. Stats

are for losers. I don't care about the polls. I don't care about anything. I care about this week. I care about what we do tonight film study-wise with Clemson, tomorrow what we do. I care about Tuesday's practice. I care about Wednesday. It's just going to be the preparation.

Preparation wins football games. Polls don't. They don't do anything. Stats don't do anything for you. Doesn't matter. You see that every week, guys are ranked in the pole go down. It's the way the world is. Just stay focused. Don't have this big vision of, hey, look at all this bologna. Just stay narrowed in, laser-focused on what the job is, and it's to win a game.

I don't care about the polls. I didn't care three weeks ago, four weeks ago. I didn't care all the preseason. You're not in the preseason; it's like, you know, it's hard to get in it when you're not in preseason. All those guys, they lose two games and get down and now they are 21 instead of 1. It just doesn't matter. I hope our guys don't focus on that at all. That's the key is don't focus on it at all. Focus on your opponent. That's the key.

Q. In terms of their running game, their offensive line -- what have you seen out of that group and that aspect of their offense?

PAT NARDUZZI: Their tight ends and their O-Line are good players. You know, again it's all got to gel together. We can point the finger, you know, we can point the finger at our own offense when this doesn't work or that doesn't work. We can point the fingers at the DBs when we give up passing yards. It's all interconnected. We have to get a pass rush. We have to set our front the right way. We have to get things done the right way.

It's 11 guys. You might have to hit that pass to get that thing to open up in the run game. So it just comes down to making plays, and you know, the more plays you make, the easier it is. You've got to have 11 players one; if you have one guy that's not taking the play, it just comes down to one guy a lot of times when you look at their run game or pass game, or our run game or our pass defense or run defense. It's all -- you've got to get 11 guys playing as one, and doesn't mean they don't have good players. Doesn't mean we don't have good players. Means they didn't play and execute at a high level.

Q. What strides have you seen your defense make these last couple games?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know. I mean, you guys tell me. You guys know. I'm just trying to coach the next day. We got better against Virginia Tech. Doesn't matter what strides we took. You take a step backwards this week;



now what strides did you make? None.

It's just, we've got to go out and play this week. I'm not worried about what strides we make. We've gotten a little bit better. Stopping Virginia Tech, that's great. That was Virginia Tech. What are you going to do against Clemson? That's your measuring stick now? It's gone. It's over with.

Our run game has gotten better on offense. We have gotten better, but doesn't really matter until you do something this weekend, and this is a big challenge for us. Like I said, this is the gauge of the ACC.

Q. With Rodney, is that part of orientation --

PAT NARDUZZI: It's just part of what happened in practice last week, put it that way. I expect Rodney to be ready to roll if we need him this week for sure. He was there. He was dressed. Rodney is still in good shape.

Q. Inaudible.

PAT NARDUZZI: No, he's a little bit banged up.

Q. I asked you about Keyshon last week, and you said he's not going to get hurt --

PAT NARDUZZI: I know -- that's your fault.

Q. Is he all right?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think he'll be okay.

Q. What growth have you seen from -- over the last month?

PAT NARDUZZI: We had three PBUs and a pick and played really well. He just keeps getting better. Damarri didn't just appear one day and be a great play, okay. It's called development; and the more snaps you get, the more comfortable you get. And he's just becoming really comfortable back there. Again, he was good against Western Michigan. I'll go back; he made some plays. But that quarterback was on fire and we didn't do anything else, anywhere else on our team to help that guy.

So I think I said that after that game that, you know, I wasn't down on him at all. I think he's played good. He just keeps getting a little bit better every week, and that's what you're looking for. That's why you coach. If he doesn't get better every week or he gets worse, then we're doing a crappy job coaching. Coach Sanders has done a great job of putting those guys in position to make plays and training their eyes and their feet to where they need to be. I'm happy with Hallett and Brandon Hill, for that matter.

Q. Is it time to get rid of an or and become your No. 1?

PAT NARDUZZI: Those ors will be taken off Friday, Thursday afternoon after our third practice. Every defense is a little bit different, okay. We're playing the best defense in the country in my opinion. I mean, maybe Georgia is right there. But this is a top-notch defense that we've got to be able to pick up all the pressures.

So it all depends. I mean, the way he ran the ball last week, yeah, I'm ready to get rid of that or; pass protection and how you practice this week, he's still a baby. Vince is an older guy that's been in some of these games before and has played against Clemson. So this will be a big week for him, and again I think he's up to the challenge and he's confident and I think he'll be okay.

Q. Is that where the competition really pays off where they have to go back into the week?

PAT NARDUZZI: That's at every position. Maybe not every position. I wish it was in every position, you look at the starting linebacker, Cam Wright and Phil Campbell are battling -- excuse me, John Petrishen and are battling. Phil Campbell used to battle with him at that position but those two are battling at that start position, and it's every week and we are going to get the best out of them.

Cam played; one of the best weeks he's had. I was really happy with the way he played Saturday. That pressure on you to compete helps you at every position when you have it.

Q. How do you feel your corners are playing and D.J., is he a guy -- he has a big arm.

PAT NARDUZZI: He's got a gun. He's got a cannon arm. He's got a quick release. He can run. Might have to get him down when he does run the football. He can definitely test us down the field. They have some good schemes and they do some things to isolate you as a corner or safety. They are going to run the RPOs as good as we've probably seen since Western Michigan.

So it will test our RPO defense and what we've learned from the past and how we can get better in the future. So he can definitely test you, throwing it deep, and I think our corners are playing okay.

Damarri is okay, missed a sack last week. Not happy with some of the PIs that we are getting, but just got to calm down and relax and play good. But you know, that's better than giving up touchdown passes and I think we gave up one deep pass, Marquez. These guys are big dudes.

These guys are 6-3 across the board at wide out. I mean, you know, I remember walking down the sideline last year at pregame and was like, oh, my God. I mean, they are some of the most beautiful wide-outs that I've seen, and that's a fact. A couple weren't even practicing. A couple didn't even play against us last year. We know Ross didn't play last year. So they are scary. Yeah, they can test us and we are going to have to play really good at corner and that's how they will beat us, with big plays.

Q. You went down to them last year and now they are coming to you guys. How do you feel home-field advantage will play?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, we'll find out Saturday. I hope panther nation shows up and we hope it's loud for them. Hope they have some communication issues. Ask the panther faithful to come on out and get loud, and we need the home-field advantage.

But you know, it's just nice to have them finally at home. We've had them down there twice at Death Valley and we've had them in Charlotte and it's just nice to finally get them to Pittsburgh. Their team has never played here. To me, there is some home-field advantage there. I'm sure they will be excited to come to an NFL stadium and put on a show. But it's our house and we've got to play like it.

And we've got to cheer like it. We've got to show up like it.

Q. I know you're focused on this weekend, but you mentioned going down to Death Valley five years ago, a big upset.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I remember winning. I remember field goal, I remember our offense was explosive with James Conner and Deshaun Watson was not easy at that time, either, another great play we played. You figure you played Trevor Lawrence twice and Deshaun Watson once and you play Venables' defense, it's always, always good, and going to put their guys in position. We went down there and made some plays, and we have to do that at home this year this weekend. That's what it's going to take, an effort like that.

Q. You mentioned keeping everything on the outside, out. Is there a thing about being too hyped? This is obviously a huge game. Is that a thing?

PAT NARDUZZI: Take a deep breath. Don't get too hyped. I think there is for some guys, yeah, you can be too hyped, I think. Kenny is going to be like this, you like your defensive guys to be hyped up. I think offense doesn't get as hyped up as defense does, naturally.

Each guy has to play within the framework of who they are. I hope they are no more fired up than they were last week. I hope -- New Hampshire was the same thing. You prepare mentally and physically the same. You can't be so much more hyped up. You can't go from 9 to 10 or 9 to 15. It's got to be -- there's got to be some calm with the with the enthusiasm. You have to control that, too. Again, skill players control it. Kancey can go probably crazy in there and nobody is going to see it, but you've got to have your mind with you there.

Q. Have you sensed that calmness the last couple weeks with the way that they have played?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think our guys, you know, last three weeks I've asked them, "Do you guys need any motivation? Do you guys need me to give you a pep talk on a Friday night?"

They are like, "No, Coach!" They are ready to go. Don't need Knute Rockne doesn't have to come in here or Dave Wannstedt to come in and give a pep talk. We just got to go play football. I think keep it like that every week, keeping it the same.

And any time I have to motivate our guys to go play a football game and get fired up for New Hampshire or Virginia Tech or Clemson, then we got issues. I think they have got to prepare the same way. That's why we like routines. It's nice that we had a 3:30 game last week; I like another 3:30 game this week. It's nice to stay on the same routine. Our guys know the process, except we don't have to worry about an hour bus trip this week, so I like that even better.

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