

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference



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

Outstanding team win for our team and for Pittsburgh this weekend. I'll start again, I say 'team' because it took everybody in this room, but it took everybody on the outside. That Panther Pit, as you guys saw, was live. It was unbelievable. I haven't seen them like that maybe since I've been here. That was the difference in the football game, I guarantee you that.

Our guys, when they see that type of atmosphere from the first quarter to the fourth quarter, it's inspiring to our guys, I can promise you that. My message would be we need them again this weekend at noon. Since we're all in this together as a team, Larry, we need 10:30 bed checks, our guys need a 10:30 bed check on Friday night, all the students need a 10:30 bed check on Friday night so they can get up early to get to Heinz Field so they can give us the same type of performance. They were all ACC this past weekend. So great job there.

Proud of our kids, the way they played. As I told them last night, they find different ways to win. We're down 7 at home against a really, really talented football team. Our guys didn't flinch at all. It's nice, you're down at Virginia Tech, you're up the whole game, it's different. Tennessee, down 10, seems like it's caving in on us. Our kids didn't flinch.

I like the different ways we win. We talked about preparing for a fourth-quarter battle. We knew we were going to have to play four this weekend, it wasn't going to be three quarters. Proud of the way our kids hung in there, continued to play and fight the entire game.

A lot of things we can still clean up. We're not near where we need to be. We will focus on our weaknesses this week, try to get better because we got a talented Miami football team coming in here, coming off a big-time win against a talented North Carolina State team.

Manny is coaching his tail off down there. You see that of the kids, the way they play. I think maybe they fell into it by

mistake, an outstanding quarterback, Tyler Van Dyke, kid from Connecticut, is a player. He's really, really good. Our defense is going to have to play really good.

They have speed all over the field, receivers to throw to. Seems every game he gets more and more comfortable throwing the ball. Shoot, 11 of his first 12 plays against North Carolina State were passes. They're not running it with Knighton, who is a great tailback, as well, one of the best tailbacks to come out of South Florida. Could have gone to Alabama, a lot of places. He taken over that role. He takes a wheel route, no one ran with him for a big touchdown last week.

Again, really impressed with the quarterback. Rhett Lashlee, offensive coordinator, has done a great job. Manny is running the defense. They have speed everywhere again on that side of the ball. They're going to mix it up from four down to three down.

We'll have a big target on our back. People will be coming after us. We'll get Miami's best game. We got to be prepared to go, have a great week of practice.

Open it up for questions.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Concussions. ESPN talked about it. Is that why you're talking about? Preface it with ESPN, injury questions.

Were those targeting calls?

Q. I don't think so. They called one off.

PAT NARDUZZI: They were nasty, nasty hits. Real questionable for this weekend unfortunately. We'll see. I mean, you can't ever project what's going to happen, but we're going to protect our kids. It's always going to be protect our guys. We'll see where they are.

I don't make that decision. Our trainers and doctors will make that decision.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: It's a great question. I'm sure they got a



protocol. I stay out of it. They just come up and say, Hey, he's out with this. That's kind of how it goes.

We got the best doctors here in the world in Pittsburgh. We do what they tell us to do. There's really not much of a discussion. It's, Here's the facts, this is what's going to happen.

Again, whatever happens, I know Jordan wanted to come back in the second half. I think he was watching the game with his mother in the locker room. She struggled to get in the locker room after the game because they're like, You can't come in there.

I'm going to see my boy.

He wanted to go back in. Things will go here good in the third quarter, I'm coming back.

She's like, No, you aren't.

We're going to protect our guys. That's all I can really say like that.

Q. Your players understand the impact of that kind of injury?

PAT NARDUZZI: We do a great job. Chris Hanks did a great job, probably the best job since I've been here of sitting at this podium pre-season camp talking about it, what's entailed in a concussion. Again, understanding that we got to -- if you get one, you think you can just lie through it and say, I'm good, I'm good. It's going to hurt you long-term, keep you out longer when those headaches appear.

I think keeping him out for a week is the best thing. Obviously we were able to pull that game out. Rodney Hammond and Vince Davis took it over at tailback. We got production out of our wideouts. We got more guys to make plays, too.

We'll miss him, but it's part of the game.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I think so. Came back and caught that seven route for a touchdown. I think that's when it was, yeah. You never know. Sometimes they don't know either.

He looked a little bit dazed, but he got right back up and went. Doesn't look terrible. I think maybe if that was the play, if it was the play, maybe someone smacked him on the helmet when he came out after that touchdown pass. I don't know. If that was the play, didn't look like he hit the

ground too hard. With that injury, you don't ever know what the effect is.

Q. Have you had a chance to go back and look at your offensive line? How did you grade them out with a front like Clemson?

PAT NARDUZZI: I thought they did an outstanding job. They had a couple holding calls, which you guys can go back and watch the tape. I thought they did a great job. They were physical, punching people. I'm talking strike, whatever you want to call it, not right hook or a left hook. But they were striking people.

There's a play early in the game where No. 47 starts to wrap towards Marcus Minor. Marcus Minor just laid him out. I know that didn't feel good for him.

They played physical, they played tough. They threw a bunch of different blitzes from different looks we did not see.

Coach Borbely does an outstanding job. My hat goes off to him and the offensive staff. Owen Drexel. Coach Borbely can tell Owen what to do, but if Owen goes out there and screws it up, it doesn't matter.

Owen has been directing traffic in a big-time way. Between Owen and Borbely telling everybody what to do, everybody executing their job up front, they've been good.

Q. (Question about Izzy.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I was hoping he would be. Again, I don't get to make those decisions, but...

Q. Rodney and Vince, how confident are you in those guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm really confident. I mean, really confident. You get worried about if one of those guys gets dinged up. We got A.J. Davis, who played a lot of good football for us, that's back healthy. We'll just kind of play it by ear, stay healthy.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Brandon is really smart. To me Brandon Hill and Erick have both. Stick with Brandon Hill because you asked that question. But Brandon Hill just continues to get better and more comfortable every week. He's doing a nice job. He played through that ball. He kind of got a double move into the boundary, which you see quite a few times. Man, he turned his hips, got back in phase, knocked the ball out on a big pass early to Ross, I believe

it was, which is a heck of a play.

He's got to play better this week as well because, like I said, Van Dyke will put it in there, maybe more on a rope, put it in that small window, not give a DB time to make up that space. Run a lot of formation in the boundary as well.

Brandon has been playing well. I like what I see out of him. He's what we thought and knew he would be. He's going to be a great player. He'll be another guy that will play at the next level.

Q. (Questions about the running backs.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, he seems to be a little bit ahead of where Izzy was a year ago. But Izzy has been getting so many more reps, so has Rodney. When A.J. went down, those guys were forced into it. You got to get it now.

A.J. was the smartest tailback we had back there. Those guys had to get a real lesson in trust. We all have to trust you to get the protections right mainly.

When Rodney runs the football, he's hard to get down. That's the difference between him and Izzy, is they just run hard, run through blocks. All good backs. BYOB, be your own blocker. Those guys are making plays by themselves, not having these gigantic holes. Nobody gets gigantic holes unless there's a bust somewhere schematically on the defense.

Vince Davis on that third-and-two had a great run. He hit it down in there. We got really three backs, might have two this week, that we really have a lot of trust in.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: It's to get them going, see who the hot guy is. Again, we got faith in both of them. They all got different things they do well. We know they both can protect the passer. We know they both can run.

We want to get them both in the game. I don't want a guy going in the third quarter or fourth quarter that hasn't taken any snaps. He's sitting on the sideline freezing with his earmuffs on. We want those guys to be involved in the game.

It's going to take two or three backs to get it done. Then you can see Izzy goes down, Rodney comes in, took his earmuffs off, took his scarf off and went to work. That's not easy to do either.

Q. (Question about Van Dyke.)

PAT NARDUZZI: We recruited him out of high school. We offered him out of high school. Obviously he went to Miami, being a northeast guy. But he's just got great composure in the pocket, has a nice arm, throws a nice, deep ball. We're going to have to play the deep ball well with all the speed at receiver. No. 11, the Rambo kid that can run, transfer from Oklahoma that is a 4-3 guy probably. He can really go. He'll play mostly on the defensive left side, so at least we'll kind of know where he is.

They got a tempo that goes with that speed. They're going to run, run, run. When he's on the other side of the field it's going to be hard to get another guy to come in and give him relief to Melquise, whoever is on him.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: He's good. He didn't practice a whole lot last week as well. Again, I think Kenny has faith in all those guys. He really does. Stovall makes a big third down catch as well, gets some YAC afterwards, a 22-yarder, if I remember correctly.

It's not like Kenny saying, I'm going to throw it to Jordan, I am going to throw it to Jared. If he does that, we have problems. Great thing is he can go through all his progressions, he's getting it to the guy that's open, the next up on his progression. It's not necessarily, Hey, I'm looking for Jared.

We're not trying to put anybody on the field that he doesn't trust. Shockey made a couple great catches as well, got some YAC. That's the beautiful thing for Kenny, he's got weapons out there. He has Lucas who had a catch late in the game, one earlier, put it ball on the ground, will get you beat. Have to make sure we prevent that. Luckily our defense came on a sudden change win there.

Q. (Question about Sam.)

PAT NARDUZZI: The trust is there obviously. He just continues to gain more and more trust every game he goes out there. I don't want to say he's a gamer, but he's done a great job of putting the ball through the uprights. That's his job and he understands that.

He's just very calm, cool and collected when he's out there. There's a lot of trust or we wouldn't put him out there, we'd just go for it again.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Right now I'd say it's Sam. Ben can hit it, too. Faith in him, too. He's got an explosive leg.

Q. After Virginia Tech, after 12 hours, the guys wanted to put that game behind them and move on to Clemson. Is it harder to do that this week?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't think so. We have a mature group in here, a senior group of leaders that will take care of it. I think we learned from our past mistakes. If we don't, we're a bunch of knuckleheads.

You can get beat by anybody in this conference every week. You see it all over the country, people getting knocked out, going down. Iowa State knocks off Oklahoma State this weekend, a top-10 team. It can happen every week.

I think our guys are smart, that's why they came to Pittsburgh and didn't go to some other institutions. They learn from their lessons. It's a critical thing. Again, we harp on it. I'm a knucklehead for not even getting after it more.

I go back to social media. We always close a chapter here, but I got to make sure they're closing it outside of here. That's the thing I harped on. If you guys see some tweets out there, Rob, still about that game, let me know. I can head it off at the pass and knock it out on Tuesday or Monday.

But I'm hoping they're not tweeting about that game; they're looking forward to the next one and letting it go. That's hard for these kids to do nowadays. Everybody is patting you on the back. Got to let it go.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: No, no. I think Sunday is a lot nicer. That's the nice buzz. Makes Sundays a little bit easier. Team meeting is a lot more fun.

But I'm not on campus. I'm not worried about our coaches, what this building feels like, because we'll get them grounded. It's when they go back up on campus, the crazy amount of students that were there, not only in the lower deck, but the upper deck. Looked like the Panther Pit up there, too. They were all over the place.

Panther Pit, another message, tell them they got more. Don't pat them on the back.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I couldn't tell you when I was 6-1. Had no idea. No, I don't see any difference. I'm getting so old that I would not remember 2015 or '13 or anything else like that. This is 2021. It's different. Doesn't matter.

I know you guys think it's coach talk. It doesn't matter. You really don't feel a certain way. You really don't. I mean, as soon as that game is over, they have a 24-hour rule. I will go home, My kids are, Dad, why are you not happy? Because I know what's on the horizon, what's coming into Heinz Field Saturday at noon.

Hard to enjoy anything as a coach at least.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: A little bit of a matchup. Again, he's been playing great. It's funny, A.J. starts off -- I'm going to get after him in spring ball. He starts off the season slow, like last year. We felt like we couldn't trust him early last season with all the COVID and all that other stuff. Maybe missing some practices, all that stuff.

But he's a guy that just continues to get better as the season goes on. Fall camp isn't enough for him to get jump started. He was a little bit banged up in fall camp as well, I believe, at least early in the season. He's just playing well right now. He's running well. He's covering well.

It's a little bit of a matchup. But we trust him a lot, too. He just keeps getting better in practice weekly. I'm excited where A.J. is.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Sometimes. Sometimes not. As a coach you're always worried about the matchup. Is he 6'3", 6'5"? Clemson's matchups were a lot different. Again, Miami is going to be 6'1" and fast. These guys, Clemson, were 6'3". Sometimes I think they lie about their heights. Most people say he's 6'2", he's 6'1". I think they say he's 6'3", when you get out there it's 6'5". They try to deceive you an opposite way. That JuJu is a big son of a gun.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I think you always got to look back on the past, what has happened. We try to do things with class here. Victory formation is a good formation, one of my favorites. Nice to end the ballgame like that with two minutes to go, no timeouts. Other people decide to go a different way than what we do.

It will always come back to get you. Karma is rough. Each one of our kids is going to have a different way that gets them motivated. I don't care what gets one guy motivated over another. Someone doesn't like what happened.

Every is going to be motivated a different way.

I don't try to pick, Hey, you're motivated by this. Let me say this to you, say that to him. It doesn't matter. It's 2021. We just got to go out and go play our game. That was the goal, was to go play our game Saturday, play football. It was about fundamentals, techniques, just doing the little things right. The big things take care of themselves if you do that. That was the message. It wasn't like, Hey, payback is a bitch. It was nothing about payback in anything I talked about.

There's always a different feeling, everybody has got something different. I'm kind of a payback guy myself.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: It's crazy, but what can you do for me lately? I tell our kids that all the time. You can be the starter this week and the backup next week. What does that tell you about our profession? We're trying to put 11 players on the field that can help you win a football game.

You got to step up and make plays every weekend. As a coach you got to do the same thing. You got to produce. Nobody cares 6-1, all that baloney. Doesn't matter what happened last week. I remind our kids every weekend, doesn't matter what bowl game you won, national championship, where your ranking is. It's what can you do for me lately?

The Panther Pit isn't going to care what happened last week when they're in the stands this Saturday at noon. They want to see it again. It's our job as coaches and players to go out and give it to them again.

Anybody else. Cut me off early today? Just having fun. Everybody good?

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