

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

Saturday, November 20, 2021
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

Pittsburgh - 48, Virginia - 38

PAT NARDUZZI: Wow, what a ball game. I couldn't be prouder of our football team in there. Not an easy game, good football team, but our guys hung in there. From the first minute to the 60th minute it was a ball game. We knew we were in for a dogfight. I'll give Brent Armstrong and Bronco Mendenhall a lot of credit.

We thought the receiving corps was as good as they -- just overall. You look at downs last week in North Carolina, we knew he was a guy you had to stop, but we had to stop all these guys. They were solid. They've thrown for a lot of yards on a lot of people. I wasn't happy with the pass defense. They had critical plays in the game. Jordan Addison with four touchdown catches. Issy takes a kickoff return for a touchdown. Addison had another big punt return that set us up.

We threw an interception in the second half. Our defense held, right in the beginning of the third quarter, wasn't a good way to start the third quarter. But then that fourth and four where Virginia was offside on the field goal, and we got a chance to have another fresh series. It was critical. Jordan Addison's last TD pass, and that fourth down stop down in the red zone.

Just a lot of plays to be made out there, and our kids made plays. They kept believing. Like I said, Virginia's a good football team. Again, Brennan Armstrong must have been able to play last week. Any wincing we saw pregame must have been an act because that guy's a tough guy and a really, really good football player.

Coastal champions, that's really not what our goal is. It's the ACC Championship. We've got unfinished business with Syracuse this weekend, and then we'll all head to Charlotte.

Q. You guys went to Jordan, two of those were on fourth down, and one was on that late third down, situations where teams might think, hey, run the ball, grind out the yards. But you went deep on those



plays. What does that say for you guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: That was the play going in. We knew they were going to try to pack the box, and we're going to try to stop it on fourth down. We were about 93 percent run on fourth and one, maybe third and one, we run the ball. We knew that. We built some tendencies up that way. Coach Whipple had to plan. It's not easy as a head coach watching us throw the ball on fourth and one. They thought it was there, and it was.

It was a great call, and we made some big plays.

Q. Last game (inaudible), what would you say about his performance?

PAT NARDUZZI: Another gutsy performance for Kenny Pickett, him and Jordan Addison. Maybe they're a tie for the Heisman. If Jordan Addison didn't get the Biletnikoff today, I don't know who does.

Kenny Pickett was outstanding, just a tough guy. Went down for a minute there and came roaring back. Threw a pick before the half, but that was a non-play really. Taking a shot, trying to get us in field goal range. Didn't like the one in the third quarter, but we'll look at it. Must have done a good job disguising coverages.

Kenny Pickett, it's great for him to go out in Heinz Field like that.

Q. How does it change your full defensive game plans losing someone on the third play of the game?

PAT NARDUZZI: Changes a lot. SirVocea is one of our best players on defense. That was a game changer. That was critical on some of the coverages we were doing. We knew he could match up with those guys athletically. We needed him in there. To not have him, that hurt us. He's become the leader of our defense and runs the show.

Brandon George and Chase Pine, Chase Pine being a senior, came in there and stepped up and made some big plays as well.

Q. What did you think of the call on SirVocea?

PAT NARDUZZI: Players play, coaches coach, and



officials officiate. I've got my opinions, but I'll keep them to myself.

Q. Is it still different than winning the Coastal a few years ago. Older group, program's in a different spot?

PAT NARDUZZI: Older group, and what feels different is being able to do it in our hometown, in Pittsburgh, in front of our Panther fans. They deserved that today. That was fun to do it here as opposed to down in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, by ourselves. We had a few fans there. But to be able to do it there, have a trophy presentation there in Heinz Field is historic for our guys.

We haven't been in the ACC that long, but to be Coastal champions twice and to be able to clinch it here in Heinz Field was critical. We didn't really talk about it during the week. I didn't want to talk about it. I wanted to be 1-0, and that's what our kids do.

Q. What about the state of the program three years later?

PAT NARDUZZI: Just 1-0 today. You guys can write what you want to write. The state of the program is good. We're in good position. But you're only as good as your last outing. We'll move on. We've got a lot of things to fix. We've got to get healthy and got a good Syracuse team up in Syracuse, New York, next week.

Q. Hard to say as a head coach. (Indiscernible). That trus you have in Kenny and Jordan personally.

PAT NARDUZZI: Kenny, Jordan, and Coach Whipple, it's like one yard, we can run a quarterback sneak and probably get it. But it's big plays in the game. It's why you hire good people to do the job and set it up and get it done.

Q. What did you like from your running game? Was Issy available late in the game as well?

PAT NARDUZZI: Issy wasn't available. Get a little tweaking, he'll be fine. He's got good dance moves in there post-game, so he's fine. We want to make sure that he's going to be okay. Again, we've got faith.

You guys ask all the time, why do we rotate those guys? Because we trust everybody. Vincent Davis had a great day. Rodney's a bull. He had some terrific runs there near the end. You can't win championships with one guy. You need to have a few.

You've got to keep them with you. You've got to keep them engaged and keep giving them the ball. I guess Vince had a nice day. I think 100 yards rushing. It was a

good day for our rushing game.

Q. A number of big plays on special teams. (Indiscernible).

PAT NARDUZZI: We've been waiting to break one. Putting Issy back there on kickoff return is a great move. He's physical. He's fast. That was fun to watch. A kickoff return for a touchdown, you don't get them very often. We've been waiting to explode in one of these special teams. It only happens when it happens.

So much touch-backs nowadays, you don't get many opportunities. They fair caught every kickoff return. They didn't like how we were running down the field. I was kind of shocked at that. Our return game's gotten good the last few weeks, especially our punt return with Jordan Addison back there.

Q. (No microphone)?

PAT NARDUZZI: I see a really good quarterback on the other side. A lot of great plays they've got. I'll look at the tape. I'll be able to tell more Monday. They just didn't make good plays. They've got good players and got a good scheme. They've done that to every team they've played. Didn't do it to Notre Dame because he wasn't out there.

It would have been a different story if a different guy was out there. I've got a ton of respect for Armstrong. He's outstanding.

Q. Alexander hasn't been one of your big producers on the pass rush. He came up big with two sacks. What have you seen from him this weekend?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm so happy for Deslin. I didn't realize he had two sacks. His whole family, we had senior night last night. We must have had ten people that came here from Florida. Deslin, I think he played for his family today. His mom and dad had not been here since his official visit. As a matter of fact, I think it was the first game they've seen since his official visit.

Just tougher to travel with family and all that. So they saw a great ball game. I saw something different out of Dez this weekend. I think he knew his family was coming, and he practiced. It was a different practice. I think he needs to bottle that practice he had up and get a little bit more. Again, I think his best days are ahead of him.

Q. Looking at John Morgan the last few weeks, 3 1/2 sacks.

PAT NARDUZZI: John's a good football player. He's got a lot of emotions and passion to play the game. He loves to rush a quarterback. Been happy with those guys. We got five sacks against them today. Felt like zero sacks today. As a head coach, I felt like we didn't get any pressure at all. We got a few in the second half that were big. Those guys are playing well up front.

Q. When did you know this team had it in them to win a division championship?

PAT NARDUZZI: Back in spring ball, I guess. We knew we had a good football team. We knew we had some guys returning. You've got Kenny Pickett, Jordan Addison, SirVocea, Dennis, Damarri Mathis, Deslin Alexander. We've got good football players. We've got to get healthy and get ready for the next one.

Q. In the fourth quarter, freshman on the field on offense, what does that say?

PAT NARDUZZI: Jaden Bradley's done some great things. I don't know the rest of those guys. Gavin Bartholomew, who was the third? Rodney, of course. Those are good football players. They've come a long way since fall camp. We had the ball for almost 11 minutes, I think, 10:54 in the fourth quarter. That's how you win championships. Our offense had the ball and kept that potent offense off the field.

Q. The division since it formed has never really had a dominant team that was analog to what Clemson has done. Do you feel like winning this championship now twice since 2018 that Pitt could be in that conversation or could lead to that?

PAT NARDUZZI: It could lead to that. We have to win an ACC Championship to do that. Winning the division is nice, but I've been part of division championships, but the real championship is to come. We want to win an ACC Championship. I think that's the ultimate goal. Until we do that, like Clemson has, we haven't done anything, to be honest with you.

What really have we done? We've done this before. I've been around the division championships, and I think our kids were happy last time just going there, but now we get an opportunity to go back to Charlotte, and it's going to be a different story. Any time you get to go once, you feel really good about it. You go the second time and go to win it the next, it's kind of what I've done in the past, and that's what we're going to do this year.

Q. I was going to ask it. Does it feel more tangible? Four years ago, you play a great team in the ACC

Championship game. You guys are sort of like, hey, we're here. This is great. Does it feel like it's attainable and not just, hey, we get to go play it. It's something that's actually --

PAT NARDUZZI: I thought it was attainable back then. I think we always have hope and faith and a belief we can win the game. I think our kids went down there, and it was a little bit different. Our guys focus on that.

Again, there's some good teams in there, whether it's Wake, Clemson, North Carolina State. I have no idea who our opponent is going to be. I haven't even looked to see what's going on over there. Who's won, who's lost, what are the possibilities of even who the opponent is. We'll dig into that next week and start to get game planning on that too.

Q. What was it like for you holding the microphone in the middle of Heinz Field?

PAT NARDUZZI: It was awesome. The fans were outstanding. The Panther Pit was like they've been all year. I can't say enough about all our season ticket holders. Everybody that showed up today, last week, the week before. They've been outstanding, the best I've seen in seven years that I've been the head coach here. Hopefully it just continues to get better. And they travel to Syracuse this weekend too.

Q. Will you allow yourself to celebrate tonight, just relish in the fact you won?

PAT NARDUZZI: Maybe. I don't know. Depends what time I get out of here. I've got to take a shower, put my suit back on. Just seeing my wife and kids out on the field, they were excited. It was good to see our families down on the field. With six minutes to go in the game, we got them down there expecting the victory. It was good our wife and kids and staff could get down and enjoy the moment down on the field.

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