

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Great win Saturday for our guys. Great to do it in Pittsburgh. Kind of moved on from it, moving on to Syracuse. I've got a big road trip up there this week.

There was good plays on Saturday, bad plays. Again, like I said, after watching the tape, quarterback was a really good football player. They got good targets. They did a nice job. It really hurt when SirVocea was out of there for sure, as you watch. We just didn't move fast to the receivers. They do a nice job. They put you in some binds, and they're good.

We had nine explosives on offense. Offense was explosive. We had more explosives than they did, and that's the key. So good things on offense, defense, special teams. Questions?

Q. Coach, how do you avoid targeting? Just as a coach.

PAT NARDUZZI: Are you trying to get me mad today or what?

Q. I want you to be happy.

PAT NARDUZZI: We haven't had one all year. Ten games, zero. Then all of a sudden, we have two. Just mysterious targeting call. That's all I -- you know, we coach good. That's what we do. It's disappointing.

Q. Does it force you to make any adjustments?

PAT NARDUZZI: No. No adjustments. Someone else has got to make adjustments. We need to play football.

Q. Do you try to spot the trend in the first half?

PAT NARDUZZI: We'll see. That would be the first thought right now, but we'll see how they practice this week and see how they go.

Q. I had somebody bring to my attention yesterday, when (indiscernible) said, if Salk can cure polio, we



sure as hell can win ten football games in a season. You're on the cusp of doing that. You have the potential to do that for the first time. I'm just curious, do you view that number as a separator in terms of how well a season goes?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. You can have a good season and win less. You can have a bad season and maybe win more. I'm impressed with the way our kids have played. I think the competition, when you look at how big that Clemson win is right now, just how well they're playing and you look at who they've gotten beat by. They haven't gotten beat by just a bunch of average teams.

It's who you're beating. That Tennessee win is a good win. So it's who you're beating and then who did you get beat by too? You look at that too. I'd like to sit here and say we're an 11-win team right now, but I can't.

Q. This is the first time you're ranked as the highest ACC team since joining the conference. Does that mean anything to you?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. It doesn't mean anything. We want to win a championship. We don't want to win a Coastal Division. That's our goals. Rankings don't mean anything. They matter at the end of the year. If you say at the end of the year you're in the top 20 or top 10 or top 5, whatever it is, that means something.

Until the end of the year, it really doesn't mean anything. The weekly rankings don't -- what does it mean? You see Oregon is up at No. 4, and again they're down. Michigan State is up there, they're down. It doesn't matter where you are midseason. The end of the season is what matters.

Q. Can you take that into kids' living rooms, though?

PAT NARDUZZI: At the end of the season, you can. I'm not going to walk in the living room saying, hey, after week 11, we were ranked, but we didn't finish there. It doesn't matter. I'm not taking a midseason ranking into the home. I can guarantee you that. Then they'll be like, hey, what happened, Coach?

Q. What have you liked about the way you guys have handled success? Especially since the Clemson



game, you sort of like established aiming this team at the Coastal Championship. The Miami game was tight, but other than that, you guys have handled business.

PAT NARDUZZI: I always say you learn from your mistakes. We did not handle success well against Tennessee going into that Western Michigan game. So you try to teach them a lesson. I said back then it might be the best thing that could happen. I would rather lose that game than an ACC game. But I think we can all agree in November that that's the case.

Our guys didn't play well that day, period. We didn't execute. We turned the ball over. Again, that's coming from success at Tennessee, and then all of a sudden you think you're pretty good and you're not. You're only as good as you are that last outing, and you've got to go out and execute to beat anybody, or anybody can beat you.

Q. Have they gotten better since then?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes, they've learned. We'll find out this week. Can they get another one? It's a weekly thing. They learn, and do they slide back into that, hey, we're good again, like we're a champion? Like it don't matter.

Coastal Championship, we've done that already. It doesn't matter anymore. It mattered, I think a couple years ago. It doesn't matter anymore.

Q. Does that describe the way the program has changed, the level of expectation? You expected to win when you got here, but this is different.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, it definitely does. I think, when you win a Coastal Championship and you win it the next time, it doesn't mean as much because it's like we're trying to take that next step. You have to win an ACC Championship to be anything. That's just the way it is. Our kids have a different attitude about that now too, I think.

Q. You've been around long enough to know that rankings only matter at the end of the year, but is it still something that the current players can get excited about or look at each week?

PAT NARDUZZI: They could. It could cause you to get beat on Saturday too, no doubt about it. It's something we don't talk about in here, and we just as coaches, as a whole, have to do a great job of grounding them and making sure, you know, we're going to go win number 10. We want to be 1-0 this week, and then we'll worry about the next one.

Q. When you look at (indiscernible), the good news is there's parity within the league. Teams have chances to win, and that's a great thing. The flip side of that is, when December 5th comes and they have that TV show and they announce the top four teams for the first time since they started this, an ACC team won't be in it?

PAT NARDUZZI: Is that right?

Q. Yeah, Florida State, then Clemson.

PAT NARDUZZI: How do you know they won't be in it?

Q. A lot of stuff would have to happen.

PAT NARDUZZI: A lot of things do happen. A lot of things do happen. So you don't know. Who knows what happens on this weekend? Who knows who gets COVID? Who knows who doesn't handle success very well. Anything could happen. You look at Oregon going down, Michigan State going down. Who knows?

I would never say it ain't going to happen, but you know -- chances are good maybe this year, compared to when Clemson's in the Final Four going into -- but so many things are going to happen in championship games. That's the thing. Those playoff rankings are going to change after championship games, I'm guessing. Don't they? I don't look at them.

Q. I guess what I'm asking is it's like what's happening in the league this year, which is good for the league. You've got in the bracket for the first time in a while, it's always the Coastal that's up for grabs the last week, and this time it's the other side. You have parity, at least what appears to be parity, that's good for the league if schools think they have a shot. Does this make a case for why there should be an extended playoff? If you win this league, you should be in whatever they determine the playoff regardless of your record.

PAT NARDUZZI: I would agree, yes. They go from two to four. Is it eight? Is it ten? Is it twelve? I don't know what it is. They'll figure it out. I'm not going to worry about it. It won't matter this year for sure.

I think it does. I think it opens things up for other teams to have an opportunity to be in that conversation for sure.

Q. Your thought at the ACC kickoff back in July, you weren't in favor of expanding that. Have you waffled back and forth between that?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes, I have. I've gone back and forth. I won't get into why, but there's all kinds of different reasons why. Again, there's so many reasons why. First of all, what do the kids like? What do the kids not want to do? The health and safety of our players. I mean, it's a long season. Are you cutting games? Are you going back to 11 to get to this model? There's just so many things that we don't need to talk about.

I'm worried about Dino Babers. I'm worried about their No. 7 rushing offense in the country. They've got a top 25 defense that plays hard out of a three-man front most of the time, and they're a good football team.

Like we can keep talking about all these other things, the world of football and where we are, but I go back and forth on that. I think both are good. I don't know if 12's the answer, going from 2 to 4 to 25 teams is a mistake. Let's gradually move to the 12 if we're going to do it, just to make sure you don't mess it up. Once you go up to 12, you can't go back to 8. I think that would be going backwards. If we're going to get a couple more teams, do it that way.

Next question.

Q. You had a let-down in 2018 in the Miami game after the Wake Forest game. How do you keep this group, after being so high on Saturday, to be grounded and get ready to play Syracuse?

PAT NARDUZZI: What year are you talking about?

Q. 2018.

PAT NARDUZZI: What happened then?

Q. You clinched against Wake, and then you go play Miami the next week.

PAT NARDUZZI: Obviously, that was 2018. That was a long time ago. Again, against a good Miami football team down there. I remember that one. I remember the next game. Again, I'm not sure that had anything to do with we felt really good after that game, I don't think.

It felt like Jimmy Morrissey was out. We had juggled the offensive line. That was maybe one of the biggest areas of issues. Then you run into a Clemson team and then should have beat Stanford in the Sun Bowl that year, if I can remember correctly. Played them really good.

I don't know if that had anything to do with handling success, but we'll find out. We'll find out this weekend for sure up in Syracuse.

Q. Did you address that with the guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: No. 2018?

Q. No, the fact that Saturday's done, now you've got a Syracuse team to face.

PAT NARDUZZI: We discussed that already, like we do every week. We closed that chapter Sunday night. It's over with. It's been since 1981 -- I think I was a freshman in high school that we won ten regular season games. I think I mentioned it to you guys the other day. It's been a long time. To me, that means something. In 40 years, there's something to prove when we go up there this weekend.

Q. Are there elements to the Syracuse game that kind of helped snap you back to say, hey, guys, we can get killed by this team's defense?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think their defensive line is active. Their defensive end's got 8 1/2 sacks, Cody Roscoe, a kid from Texas, is a guy -- they can put pressure on the quarterback. Their D-line coach is one of my former players at Northern Illinois, Vincent Reynolds. They're active up there. They're going to put pressure on the quarterback.

We've got to protect our quarterback better than we did Saturday. We didn't do a great job, in my opinion. For whatever reason. Whoever's issue there, whether it's a lineman, a running back, a quarterback.

Again, they've got a good defense. They've got a top 25 defense, and maybe the record doesn't show that, and they can run the football. With Tucker, the tailback that's rushed for 1,500 yards, and Shrader, their quarterback, those are the two guys we have to stop. It's going to be a two-headed monster there. They don't throw it like Virginia, but they're going to try to run it down your throat.

Q. What about Roscoe, Cody Roscoe?

PAT NARDUZZI: Again, first of all, their defense plays with a high motor. I think they're different than some other three-down teams, where they're not these 340-pound nose tackles, like Siragusa. That's not what they are three-four wise. But they're athletic. They move around. So our guys are going to have to block them up front and do a great job communicating up front.

He's just an explosive, fast, quick twitch guy.

Q. Are Shrader's yards more run than what you've

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seen from most of the quarterbacks as far as, instead of scrambling to throw, he's looking to run?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, they are quarterback runs. They're definitely designated whether it's a draw, whether it's a counter, quarterback counter. They do all kinds of different stuff. But it's quarterback -- they'll run zone read keepers more than anybody that we've seen. I think we maybe have 14 in our breakdown. They want to get him the ball. And they will.

So we're going back and look at every quarterback run that we've had against them for the last four years, look at the last four years, just any quarterback run against us, just seeing -- they're going to get creative. They do a good job of going back and looking at what you've done in the past and look at what issues have had this season will be critical quarterback runs.

So they do some whamming of the three technique. I want to say Villanova -- not Villanova. New Hampshire hit us on kind of an outside zone stretch, which is one of the plays they run for a touchdown against us. All of those, just going back and saying what's hurt us? We've got to do a self-scout this week, which we will. They just do a good job of bringing stuff up from the past.

Q. Rodney's role more specifically is like the closer almost for your backs? That fourth quarter guy who sits there and basically watches for most of the first three quarters? It seems deliberate at this point, right?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's really not deliberate. He's going to be a terrific football player. He is a terrific football player, obviously. When you watch that guy run, his one touchdown, his one-yard plunge in there was like the hardest one yard of the year. He was not going to be denied.

He's a football player, and he's just going to -- I think he had one little protection issue in the game, which hurt us a little bit. But he just gets better every week, I think. He gets more comfortable. He had a great week of practice last week.

I wouldn't say he's the closer. You've got Vince. You've got Issy. Those are three really good tailbacks. Maybe he gets in earlier this week. Who knows?

Q. Do you have to be careful with guys who are nicked so they'll be ready to play?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. That would be a natural question. Let's go up there and keep them all healthy and play our backups and get ready for the championship

game. I would love to do that, but I don't see doing that.

Q. Ten wins means a lot.

PAT NARDUZZI: Ten wins means a lot, and I think we need to have that chemistry going into that next game too. We'll keep them healthy and let our guys go.

Q. You've lost two offensive linemen, two wide receivers, and a middle linebacker on Saturday. You're still 9-2. Does it speak to recruiting?

PAT NARDUZZI: It does. We'll find out. Keep staying healthy. Everything speaks to recruiting. That's how your program is built is who you're bringing in and can they play? We had some guys that took over for Voc in there, but it wasn't the same. But they were good enough to win the football game. Brandon George played well. Chase Pine played well. Got a lot more reps and learned a lot from it too.

Q. You mentioned at the end there will be a small segment of preparing for the week after this, for the title game. I'm curious, you've got three teams --

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm not. We've got coaches, graduate assistants, quality control. I told Sunday they're on it, yes.

Q. Are they required to come up with X amount of film on each group? Is it weighted to see how it's going to go?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's game planning for three teams, getting all the information in the computer. Basically, we have all the videotapes. What game are we going to break down? We'll break down usually five games per team. Usually it's breaking down five games on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, just to have it in there on the next opponent.

So last week we broke down five games on Syracuse, plus our Pitt game, which is already broken down, from 2020. So we'll have a six-game breakdown. That's what they do.

Now you've got to go back, and now they've got to break down five games on -- so they've got 15 games to break down, and they've got to do it all this week. Those guys, they're the MVP this week. A lot of wasted work. 10 of those 15 games is wasted, but it will be well worth it on Sunday when we know that we're already ahead, not behind.

Q. Does it matter who you play in that game, do you think?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. I'm worried about Syracuse, and whoever lines up there, we get to play. It doesn't matter. Does it matter to you guys? Larry, does it matter to you?

Q. I'd like to see you play Wake Forest, but that's me.

Q. Clemson's playing a lot better since you beat them.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, they are. So you want to play Clemson?

Q. I'm not playing.

PAT NARDUZZI: I should ask you guys. Chris, who do you want to play?

Q. I don't know.

PAT NARDUZZI: You don't care. That's how I am. I don't care either. What other questions we got?

Q. That sort of leads me to follow up, though. Is it better to play a team that might be -- that might have inexperience. If Wake gets there, Wake hasn't been there in that situation.

PAT NARDUZZI: Did you watch tape on Wake?

Q. Wake is very impressive on offense.

PAT NARDUZZI: Everybody's watched a Saturday night game or a Thursday, Friday night game. If they're in that game, they're a good football team. They've won enough games to get to that game, it doesn't really matter, guys. It's a different game, so it doesn't really matter. Whoever gets there is going to be excited to go play in that game, both teams.

Q. I know that the emphasis that you would normally give in situations, but is there any emphasis, when you look at Jordan and Kenny together, maybe in this game against Syracuse, there are more opportunities to try and get either of them looks? Because Jordan is on verge of getting Biletnikoff, Kenny obviously on the road to maybe getting the Heisman.

PAT NARDUZZI: You said just get them more stats?

Q. Not just more stats, but getting them more playing opportunities in this game, even if, like you say, it doesn't matter.

PAT NARDUZZI: We're going to throw it to the open guy, and there's certain plays that go here and go there. Based

on coverage, it dictates a lot of things. Kenny gets the ball every snap. So he gets to -- no, we're not going to do anything different as far as -- you know, we're going to try to win a football game. I don't want guys throwing into coverage trying to make a play.

We're not worried about those awards. I mean, it would be nice for both of them, but we're trying to win a football game.

Q. Jordan is one of those guys that doesn't have to be open to be open, right?

PAT NARDUZZI: True, true. He went and snagged that last ball. I think Kenny thought that No. 8 had fallen down. So he didn't even see him as he threw that one. I think he just threw it out to make sure it was a completion. He didn't overthrow it or underthrow it. All of a sudden, that guy snuck in at Jordan, but that was a great catch.

A lot of times he's open, though. There's a lot of times maybe he doesn't get the ball when he is open.

Q. What did you see after you watched the video from your pass defense? What was happening?

PAT NARDUZZI: A couple times guys not doing their job, trying to help out. That same issue we had a few weeks ago at Miami. Again, a good scheme. We've got some schematic things that are lining up and empty. You're spread out. We've got five sacks on them, but we couldn't get pressure. I think he did a great job getting the ball out of his hand and finding the open zone when we did blitz them. So pressure was not good unless we got them to third down and long.

He might have completed it, but it was short of the sticks and they had to bring their punt team out anyway. They did a good job throwing the football. They've done that all year. They've shown they can do that against everybody. But they didn't run the football. That's one-dimensional. A lot of times, you win those football games.

Q. Some of the problems increasing because of communication issues without SirVocea?

PAT NARDUZZI: A little bit more disconnected there. Again, it's an athletic thing. SirVocea can cover the field. He's an outside linebacker playing middle linebacker. It's like having a nickel mike back out on the field. He's got a great nose for the football.

Like playing the run this week, Brandon George fit perfect in that. Chase Pine fit perfect. Last week you'd like to have three more DBs on the field, to be honest with you.

We don't have enough of those.

Q. If you look around college football, there's some programs that have success, but a guy has a little bit of an issue and he's gone immediately. In Florida yesterday, they ran the buzz saw.

PAT NARDUZZI: Head coach you're talking about? Okay, got you.

Q. You, Clawson -- but there are some guys in this league who are having success and the administration's upset with them. Not that you've had a terrible run, but some schools would be like, all right, after four years, we're done. You view this year as the patient approach to kind of how to team build?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think so. To me it takes time. It takes time to develop an offense. It's taken Whipple three years to get it to where he'd like it. Your kids know what's going on, and they feel comfortable. Anything that's going to be great takes time. Sometimes people are impatient.

Dan Mullen's won a bunch of championships down there. I think three New Year's Six bowls, and all of a sudden he's not having a great year this year and all of a sudden. He's a good football coach. It's a shame, but it's life in college football.

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