

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: All right. Good to be here. It's a Monday for you, it's a Wednesday for us. Tomorrow is our Perfect Thursday getting ready for this football game. Obviously a big game, not just because it's the Backyard Brawl, because it's the first game of the season. Would be a big game no matter who it was. Rivalry game adds more to it.

We know they'll come up, there's a lot of hatred on their end, but going to be a lot of hate on our end. That's what it comes down to in rivalry games. We'll get our guys coached up.

They are well-coached. I have a lot of respect for West Virginia, their coaching staff and their players. We've watched a lot of tape throughout the last four months, five months, whatever it's been. A ton of USC tape, a ton of Virginia tape, their spring game. I watched every throw. JT Daniels will be the starting quarterback. If they haven't made that announcement, I'll make it for them. He will be the starting quarterback.

I watched I think 238 throws he's made in the last couple years there. Again, he's very, very capable. I can see why he's the starter. He can make every throw. He's really, really talented. We'll have our hands cut out for us on that end.

Dante Stills is one of their top defensive ends, a play-maker on the D line. They go in and out of three down, four down. It will be a great challenge for us.

I'll say this. You can have a great camp. We finished a great camp last Friday. But it comes down to what are you going to do on September 1st. That's what it comes down to. What you did in pre-season, how camp went, practice went, scrimmaging here and there, it doesn't really matter. Thursday will be the first opportunity we find out what we have.

That's a fact. It's not coach speak. That's really how I feel. How good a football team do we have? How good do they have? A lot of unknowns.



They got some transfers. We got some transfers. We got new guys that they're looking at tape from somewhere else. A ton of unknowns. It's one of the hardest games to prepare for in the openers because you have to prepare for so much offensively and defensively.

What did they put in in the off-season? Who knows. We don't know. They don't know. We got wrinkles. I'm sure they'll have wrinkles. That's what makes openers so much fun.

Questions.

Q. Abanikanda, looking at the depth chart, separating himself from the others...

PAT NARDUZZI: I think I forgot to put that in there.

I don't know. He's been really steady, so we'll find out. Again, doesn't have (indiscernible) right now. I didn't forget. He came out of fall camp looking really good.

I'll tell you what, don't get comfortable because those other guys are really good, too. There's a lot of talent in the backfield.

Again, we're going to find out on game day. They can look talented against our defense, in a drill, period. But for me is Thursday, 8 p.m., we're going to find out who is that guy. We feel comfortable with all those guys in the backfield that not only can make yards after contact, they can also protect the quarterback.

Q. What is the process for educating these guys about what this means?

PAT NARDUZZI: I won't get into that. Just comes down to educating them. Doesn't matter if you're educating them on how to be a reporter, how to ask good questions, be an artist. We're going to try to give them as much education as we can on it, teach them what a rivalry game is.

I don't know if I've mentioned this to you before, mentioned it in the kickoff luncheon, you learn really quick what a rivalry is. Some of our guys don't know. I didn't know before I got to Michigan State in 2007 what a big-time rivalry was. A rivalry at Rhode Island was Brown. That was your big rivalry? Really?



I think you have to understand where it's coming from. They hear from other people. I can tell you this, just to finish the education. When you have to educate, you try to bring in guest speakers, right, Billy? Bring in the best guest speaker you can.

Our honorary captain, I couldn't be more excited, Dave Wannstedt. He's coming back at Acrisure Stadium and I'm excited to have him here. One of my real idols. I'm not talking about because I'm the Pitt head coach, but he's a guy that I've always, always looked up. We played him at Cincinnati, he was with the Dallas Cowboys, watching 3-4 stuff. To have him here, experience who Dave Wannstedt is. Former player, former great coach, Super Bowl with the Cowboys. He's done everything. Now with FOX. You got the ultimate captain for this football game.

Don't think he's going to take a snap for us, that won't matter. Going to try to educate them with Dave Wannstedt and anybody else we can.

Q. (Question regarding a speaker that spoke to the team on Friday.)

PAT NARDUZZI: No, I have not yet. I may. If you give some more tips afterwards, it would be good (smiling).

But no, he was awesome. He was really good. It's stuff like that. They just need to know what they're getting into. As I say, they're playing for their families. Their families will be up there in the stands. To me you always got to make it personal. It will be personal.

Q. What does it mean to you for them to be willing to come back?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, it means the world really. He's a Pitt man. He's a busy man as well as a Pitt man. For him to take time out of his schedule, we're excited. It means everything really.

It's hard to get some guys back like him. We're excited to get him back.

Q. Have you learned anything from the renewal of the Penn State rivalry on how to prepare players for sort of this type of experience?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think you do. You learn from every rivalry game you played in. No doubt about it. You learn a lot of different things about it, whether you win 'em or lose 'em.

We won that first one, Penn State. I guess did a crappy

job on the other two. Should have gone for it on fourth-and-one (laughter). It's on me. I know you all had the right answer. Someday I'll tell you the truth. Someday I'll tell you the truth (smiling).

Q. Penn State, it was early in the season. When you were at Michigan State, it was late in the season. You're playing this one first. Do you have a thought about maybe ideally where these games would go in the schedule? What is different about playing one first?

PAT NARDUZZI: There's nothing difficult. They got to do it. We got to do it. It's even. It's a wash.

But I think when you look at the tradition of it, back when I remembered it, I haven't gone back to look when it was played. It was around Thanksgiving. I remember watching that things in Youngstown, Ohio, on a weekend, Thanksgiving. In the future that might be where it ends up being, late in the season.

Q. You mentioned you wanted the players to make it personal. Is this where you want them to have extra juice or treat it like any other game?

PAT NARDUZZI: That's a great question. You want to have extra juice, but you have to have your composure, too. It's a brawl, a fight. You have to have composure.

Haven't had that with our team, but maybe they'll read it, Jerry tweeting it out today or something.

We have to have great composure. We didn't have great composure against Miami last year, personal fouls which drove me nuts. I don't want to get them too hyped because they have to play smart and not get out of control.

Q. You come in this season as defending ACC champion. Any perspective you have or that you give to the players as the defending champions, how to handle it?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, that talk was done a long time ago, okay? The ACC Network is supposed to send me a blanket to cover up the trophy in there.

That was last year. I mean, golly, that was so long ago, that quarterback is playing right next door. He's not going to play for us this year.

Last year was done. This is a new team. That's why we're going to find out what we got Thursday night. I think that's the important thing. Nobody cares what you did last year. It's about right now.

Q. The two guys you brought in, they worked there way to the top of the depth chart, what did you see in their journey? How do you see that room as a whole?

PAT NARDUZZI: That room gives me chest pains some days, okay? I can tell you that. Just stay right there.

But Keyante was in spring ball. Quick twitch. Got really good speed. He's a play-maker. Has really good hands. That's what he's does. Good knowledge of the offense. Really smart football player.

Then Bub Means is a guy that came in the summer. He's worked well with the rest of the receivers. He's worked well with the quarterbacks. He's huge. His thighs are bigger than yours, Chris. He's a wideout. And he can run, okay? He's probably a four-six guy. He's long. He's got good hands.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Just drives me nuts. Leave it at that.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I wish I could. I won't (smiling).

Q. Because you're a defensive guy?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, no, no. Little detail stuff all the time. Little details. Got to be detailed.

Q. Last Power Five opponent in the opener was Virginia, three years ago. Was there anything you took from that as far as how you approach your preparation?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. I think that was a crappy game. It was first year of a first-year offensive coordinator. We didn't play very good. Didn't look very good in the first game. I look at that as maybe just a bad-looking offense at that point. We just weren't very productive that night from my recall.

Q. From all the tape you watched on JT, what stood out the most to you about him?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, you don't see him scramble very much. He can make every throw. He's very cerebral, I think. He makes the right decisions.

I tell you a quick story about it. Holly cow, Coach LaSala was in there. I was watching all his throws. I think it was on play, I don't know, 128. Probably on play 120 as I'm

going through it.

I'm like, Is this guy ever going to throw an incomplete pass? Phil, one of our quality coaches, had sorted it by completions. I'm not leaving here until he throws an incomplete pass. It wasn't till about play 128. Holly cow.

He's just very accurate. He's smart. He can throw a really good deep ball. Our corner has to be really good in coverage. Thrown a lot of deep balls this week. That is their favorite route, four verticals, three verticals.

Q. Kedon obviously very familiar with Daniels and the offensive coordinator. Have you picked his brain about tendencies or stuff from his experience with those two guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: No. Next question (smiling). He doesn't know anything.

Q. You are never sure about how a game is going to turn out, but what does your gut tell you about what this team can do this year?

PAT NARDUZZI: My gut? If I ever listen to my gut, okay, it's not good (smiling).

You don't know. You don't know. I mean, I think we got a good football team. We'll find out Thursday night. Then you find out week by week if they can sustain and keep it together.

I think we got a good team. We'll find out.

Again, like I say, it's hard every day when you're going against each other to find out what you have. For example, yesterday good on good, the offense wins 9-4. We had 13 snaps. They win 9-4. Who won that rep? Offense completes a ball for five yards or more, I'm giving it to the offense. Today the defense wins 8-4. Which team shows up, coverage shows up, who is motivated? As a coach you wish it was 6-6, okay, we're competing. You got to compete every day. We have to find out where they are.

It's kind of like you studied for the last, you know, eight months, it's been eight months, we studied for eight months for this test, we're going to take the test. The test is Thursday night. So you find out I think at that point where you are.

You don't know until you take the test. You can study, study, study, you've been on your iPad, your computer, but you have to show up for the test and do something.

Q. Have to feel good about what they did prior to the

test.

PAT NARDUZZI: That's right. I think they're prepared. We'll find out. Still got to take the test. But I feel good in our preparation so far.

Q. What kind of charge have you put to the big guys on the team to set a tone for a first game?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think they know. Every year we talk about it. It comes down to those guys up front. We say it starts up front. If we're going to be successful, you better have a good D-line, a good O-line. You can have all the skill in the world, but if you don't have anything up front you have a problem.

I feel comfortable with those guys. You got to go out and do it. Offensively we've stayed away from the (indiscernible) camp. Your biggest concern is for your D-line, linebackers for that matter. We've avoided and not tackled a quarterback all camp. Now we got to go tackle one live.

If you said, What is your biggest concern, is tackling in an opener, especially tackle a quarterback. Should be pretty good on a running back, because we do that. We haven't hit a quarterback in a while. This week our scout quarterbacks, they got to give us a good look.

Q. They have a good offensive line. You are know for your defense. A big matchup?

PAT NARDUZZI: They've got four returning starters up front. They got most of their offensive line back. James Gmiter, if I pronounce that right, from Bethel Park, recruited out of high school, playing left guard for them. There's some familiarity with some of those guys.

They're talented. They got a really good O-line coach that was at Texas Tech. We went back and watched Texas Tech in the Alamo Bowl because Sam was there and their O-line coach. Watched a little bit of the trap stuff.

Q. You brought up how Daniels likes to go deep, offensive coordinators have to go deep. How important does that make Erick and Brandon's role as safeties?

PAT NARDUZZI: It makes all those guys. We're based out of our corners. Got some change-ups, of course. But those guys, they're out there on an island. Those corners are pressed up out there. Safeties are going to do what they do. They're going to be involved in the run game and the pass game. To say they're all pass game is crazy because they got to be involved in the run game. If they

aren't involved in the run game, it won't really matter, they'll run the ball down there and throw it. They got a big job.

Q. Is there a different bit of a buzz going into this opening week just knowing you're playing an historical rival?

PAT NARDUZZI: No question about it. I don't even remember who we played last year in the opener. It was UMass. There's no question about it. Everybody likes a little bit of a warmup game just to get going.

But I think it's better to have a game like this to be opening up with, I believe, just 'cause your kids are cranked up for it. I think it helps in the preparation. The guys aren't sitting there going, Oh, yeah, we only have UMass. Then you glide through camp.

I think there's been a lot of juice through camp. Like I said, I think we've had a really good football camp.

Q. Kenny's prediction is 31-10, Pitt win. What do you think?

PAT NARDUZZI: Kenny. Should know better. Have to text him. Should know better. He can do that now he's in the NFL.

I ignore all that noise. Heard that last night. My son might have told me or I was told this morning. He's got predictions. Kenny hasn't watched any tape, okay? He's watched other tape, I'm sure (smiling).

Q. Grew up an hour from here. Is this something that was on the map for you? Something that registers, stands out?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, I wish I could tell you a lot of things back then. I just remember watching the game as a little kid. I remember the brawl.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

PAT NARDUZZI: All right. Thanks.

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