

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Pat Narduzzi

### Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: We had a great Thursday night. I was happy not only for our fans but our football team. We closed that chapter last night. Chapter 1 is closed.

We've got a lot of things we can learn from the game. I think there was a lot of learning moments that our kids took away. Obviously we did not play a perfect game. We never will, but it was just an average football game for us.

A lot of things we left out on the field. Explosive plays on offense, giving up explosives on defense, letting someone run the ball like they did is not our MO, and stuff that we've got to clean up that we will clean up.

But when you look at it all together, we played a really, really good opponent. I think West Virginia is a good football team. They'll have a lot of success this year, I think. I think they're better than they were a year ago, so we can look at it and say, hey, we came out of there, played average, or below average, whatever you want to call it, and got a win, and then we've got to play a lot better this week and have a chance in the Johnny Majors Classic, as you guys know, coming up.

I'll moving on, just going into the next game, we've had at least an extra two days to kind of work on them, and it's exciting to have them come into Pittsburgh. Sounds like the first time an SEC team has been coming into Acrisure Stadium, so we're excited about that. We know we're going to get their best shot. They're talented. They're athletic. They're an SEC football team that is going to look the part when they walk into the stadium on Saturday.

Coach Heupel does a great job. He's a football coach.

Offensively, there's not a more explosive offense, not a faster tempo offense in the country. Alex Golesh is also the offensive coordinator, but I think Heupel kind of does most of it, but Alex is a good coach, as well.

They're good. They're going to snap the ball between seven and 12 seconds 75 percent of the time, so if you guys are up in the box, don't step away because you'll miss



three plays if you turn your head. It'll be fast. They're athletic.

Hendon Hooker, who we've seen for the last 12 years as a quarterback, he's still there. He's an old Virginia Tech quarterback. He's got lots of weapons with speed everywhere on the field.

Then defensively, Coach Banks is the DC, and multiple coverages and fronts. Be a lot of stuff going on.

A really good football team coming in here. Again, they knocked the heck out of Ball State early last week. I think Hooker was out after 61 plays, so they didn't play a whole bunch, but we've been in a battle.

Questions?

**Q. It seemed like Kedon was maybe a little more effective out of the shotgun than under center. When you and Frank went back and looked at it, was it a comfort level or what was the difference?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, I think he's comfortable doing both. We're going to continue to do both. What appeared on tape to be better, probably just a coincidence. He's good under center, as well.

Again, you want to have the ability to do both. We want to be multiple on offense and continue to get better.

We didn't play a perfect game. I thought Kedon played a really good game, really good, better than I thought when I watched it live. But he was -- we thought he was late with the ball, but there was other issues with some of the routes, and I won't get into the weeds with that, but there was some -- he was waiting on his receivers to get where they needed to be and they weren't there for whatever reason that we won't discuss.

There were some things there, some angles that weren't right where he's got to hold onto it and just throws it away just because of some departure angles on routes and little things like that, just details that you guys probably wouldn't see on tape. I didn't see it. It's news to me when I listen to Coach Cignetti. He's really sharp.

A lot of things -- everything is fixable. That's the good



thing. Everything is going to get a lot better from week one to week two, but the opponent is going up, as well, so maybe you don't see it with the naked eye.

**Q. SirVocea talked Thursday night about how something you guys struggled with last year was playing well the week after a really big game. He pointed out how you lost to Western Michigan after Tennessee and how you lost to Miami after the Clemson game. He talked about how handling success and adversity is a big focus for the senior leaders and training that to the other players. What are some challenges that come after a big emotional win like you had on Thursday?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, well, we've talked a lot for eight years on handling success and handling adversity. I think our guys are used to handling adversity every day. They deal with it. We handled adversity well Saturday. We hung in there all the way for 60 minutes. Handling success is always a problem. It's always the biggest issue you'll have on a football team. The hardest thing people have in life is handling it.

But you know, I think handling success this week, when you kind of played shitty - let's just put it that way - I think it makes it a little bit easier. How about that? If they can get excited about that, then good for them. You didn't see me dancing around in the locker room, okay, and there will be no dancing.

**Q. Did having two days help?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No question about it. As far as emotionally for the kids, I think so a little bit, but we still drug it back up last night because we try to clean up everything from special teams to offense and defense, give the kids Saturday off.

Emotionally I don't think the two days are going to make any difference.

**Q. You talked after the game, you were hot about how the run defense played. What did you see after looking over the film that says, hey, this is what we have to clean up to make sure this doesn't happen?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I think it starts with coaches. It starts with me. Anytime we're shitty, it starts right here: Shitty head coach. It trickles down to not making plays.

I think sometimes for openers you can have too much in because you're not sure what you're going to get, and I think defensively it started with having too many things in that you're worried about; what if they do this; what if they

do that; we'd better have that in; we'd better have this in; we'd better have some of this, too. You've got to have a flavor of everything in, and sometimes you put too many flavors in, you're going to have a problem. I think that's part of it.

To me it's on coaching. I went back and just kind of did a statistical thing on hey, what did we call, what did we practice all week. I think we had 371 snaps of base defense and then what did they end up calling. We wasted a lot of time.

I think sometimes like narrowing it down, never having played West Virginia, you go into this game this weekend, but we've played Tennessee four times already, or this will be the fourth time, two at UCF, one at Tennessee. This will be the fourth opportunity to face that style of offense, the same kind of defense that they've been running.

I think that helps you a ton of knowing what you're going to get, what you do need, don't need, what you've got to be ready for, and you always want to have enough in in case they do something different. But I just feel like we practiced too much of stuff which doesn't give your kids an opportunity to be cleaner.

So I think that'll help us.

**Q. You faced Joe Milton last year, Hendon Hooker this year; do you see any differences or similarities between the two quarterbacks?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, we played them both last year. They're both really good. Joe started the game off, and he's got a cannon of an arm. He's athletic. He played well when he got in the other day as well against Ball State. And then Hooker came in. I think we turned Milton over a few times, which we've been known to do, and Brandon Hill had a nice pick against Hendon Hooker. They're both good quarterbacks.

Again, it starts with their offense. They do certain things. They take advantage of you. They have what we call these "max splits," and they're going to spread you out. You're going to be in man coverage all day, even if you don't want to be in man coverage. You want to be in cover three? Good luck to you. They're going to be -- their favorite formation is having two detached receivers in the offensive line. The quarterback and running back are going to be in this little podium area here and then everybody else is going to be lined up way out there, and that's what they do. They spread you out.

So it is a spread, fast-tempo offense, and again, both Milton and Hooker do a great job of operating.

**Q. Is there a lot to learn from last year's win because it was almost 365 days ago? Is that too much time with the transfer portal and everything to really go back and look at how that team operates, or are you still breaking down that film and gathering a lot of information from the win last year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: If we're still breaking down that tape from last year, we've got some major issues. We're like in slow motion like a turtle. No, we've looked at that. We've looked at stuff all summer on Tennessee and every opponent that we play.

We're ahead as far as where we need to be. We've dissected it. We know what we did well, what we did bad, what we have to do to fix it. But they're going to have stuff that they're going to do to say, okay, this is what Pitt did well; we've got to do this. They're going to have their other options, and that's what happens when you play a team several times.

You know, I hope we figure it out, what we did in the past.

**Q. Because you're familiar with Hendon, what have you been able to key on as far as his decision making when he's had success against you guys and when you guys have been able to get the upper hand on him?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, there's nothing. It was just guys making plays. He's got a great arm. He's smart. Like I said, you look at where he is right now compared to where he was two years ago when he was at Virginia Tech, two totally different guys. That's obviously a tribute -- that's no slam on what Virginia Tech did with him, but he fits into that offense, and his quarterback coach is coaching the heck out of him, and I think he's really, really sharp.

**Q. About the rush offense, what have you seen when you look at that tape?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Again, I think West Virginia was good up front. They packed the box. We didn't do a good job of adjusting -- they had the numbers in the box. We've got to give ourselves a more friendly box if we're going to try to run it. Again, was disappointed in the offensive line and their play, so maybe they had fat heads; maybe they were thinking about how good they were, and we're all coming back and we're going to be great. But they weren't. That's flat what it is.

They should have a little bit of a chip on their shoulder this week to come back and show who they really are.

We never talk about the run defense. This is good. Usually it's always the pass defense. You can see how annoying it is when someone can run the ball. Like it's not good, okay. It just opens up everything. I mean, now they can throw it and they can run it.

**Q. Was there any problem with failure to get off blocks?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say no. I would say no, that wasn't -- there's guys there to make plays. It was mental, hesitation, poor fits, or poor alignment sometimes. If you don't get lined up perfectly, it's a problem. So just a lack of detail in what we're doing, and sometimes that happens in openers. I talked to a couple guys who were like, Coach, it's a lot different than practice. Yeah, it is, but you've got to make it the same.

But that's what happens when guys play for the first time.

**Q. Does it talk to the maturity or the evolution of the program that you can play a game against a rival and play, in your words, average to below average and still find a way to win?**

PAT NARDUZZI: It does, a little bit. Obviously just talking to Coach Stac, we've got GPSs on the kids and we can see how fast they're going. We can't use the data in game, but just we've got more guys running over 20 miles an hour than anytime since we've been here, so our guys are running fast. I think we had 28 guys running over 18 miles an hour, so we've got guys that are running well.

We didn't have the data back in 2015, but it would be interesting to compare '15 to '22.

You know, sometimes you give up a blocked punt; you turn the ball over. But we gave them plenty of options to come back in the game besides the lack of detail. Turnovers in itself could cause you big problems. You give up a five-yard drive and we gave them all kinds of stuff that you can't against good football teams.

**Q. An injury question. Is there any word on Desmond and Rodney and will they practice this week?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know I'm not going to talk injuries. Those are private things.

When Brandon Hill was banged up earlier in the year, I'll never forget -- as a matter of fact, I'll pull it up here. Adrian, she said -- this is August 14th, so it was probably -- I know it wasn't Jerry. "Hey, Coach Narduzzi. I saw the interview on Friday where the reporter asked about Brandon. Thank you for respecting his medical privacy. It

looked like that question pissed you off. Thank you for caring about your players. I can see you care about all of them." It goes on and on, and some emojis. That's from Brandon Hill's mother. Parents to me, that's the first ever I got from a parent. I was like, you know what, I guess I'm not screwing it up too bad. Next question.

**Q. I know you like to block out the outside noise, but you guys are an underdog at home against a team you beat last year coming off a year in which you won your conference championship. You might block out the noise, but is that a chip that you guys might play?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, you'd like to be the underdog every week. I don't even know what the point spread was last week. We were probably the underdog last week at home. I know our crowd was the underdog for sure going into that game.

But you know, it is what it is. It's a good football team coming here. You've heard all summer about the SEC, and there's only really two Power Five conferences in the country, the SEC and the Big Ten, so we're in the pee-wee league, and we're going to line up and see if we can play.

**Q. Florida State had a big win last night; you guys beat a Power Five team; Carolina and NC State escaped against Group-of-Five programs that made bowl games last year. During media days you guys talked about the only way to change the perception of the league is going out in non-conference and playing quality opponents and winning. Did you guys feel like you struck a blow for the conference over the weekend?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Maybe, but I'm not worried anybody else. I'm just worried about how Pitt is doing and how we can get better every week, how we can fix our issues. I'm happy, last night I watched the tail end of that game and was happy for Coach Norvell. I texted him this morning. Anytime coaches have good wins, it's good to see.

It's great for the conference, and I'm sure the commissioner is happy. I'm just worried about staying in our lane and doing what we need to do here in Pittsburgh.

**Q. Branson Taylor played the last drive or so at right tackle. How did he do, and will you give him more time going forward?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think Branson will get some more time. Probably we should have subbed him in earlier. It's a long game, and again, I think one of the issues is just subbing guys in.

Jaylon Barden didn't get enough reps. Jaylon Barden deserves more reps. I think Branson Taylor is a good football player. I think Matt might have got a little bit tired near the end. It's an emotional game, it's a physical game, and Branson came in and did well.

I told the guys the night before the game, Wednesday night, like hey, this is an evaluation period. You put good stuff on tape -- Tylar Wiltz should have got more. We should have got Tylar in the game more.

But there's just -- at different positions you get two or three plays, then we've got to get you more. If you go out there for two and you look good, then we're going to give you more the next week, and you try to earn those reps. So I think that's what kind of goes with it. Sometimes coaches make mistakes and we don't sub guys enough and don't have a good enough plan or don't see the amount of reps guys are taking or not taking.

**Q. You mentioned Wiltz. Obviously you didn't have Brandon, but were you hoping to rotate the linebackers more than you did?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, yeah and no. I think we wanted to. For whatever reason, we just didn't get to do it enough. We need to. Put it that way. We just need to keep them fresh. The D-line gets -- freshness helps develop those guys, and I don't want to find out what Tylar is like when he doesn't have any reps under his belt, so he needs to get his feet wet with some Power Five ball.

**Q. (Indiscernible.)**

PAT NARDUZZI: We missed him a couple times. So he was open a few times where we didn't get it to him. But we'll get it to him more. We'll get it to him.

**Q. Did the expansion, the decision to expand the playoffs, I imagine if that was in place last year you guys would have been in the tournament, so...**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, it would have been -- it's great. We all want to play -- everybody wants to get in the playoffs, right? Go to 25 teams; we're good. I think everybody would like that. It's still just what does it all -- what all comes of it.

I don't want to spend a lot of time on that. We've got a big game up. But more teams, the better it is for everybody. The more people can say, hey, I was in that playoff, the key is let's get in it first and then we'll deal with what happens when we get to it. So yeah, everybody has got more opportunities, and more opportunities are good.

It's like I said over the weekend, it comes down to it better not be all about the money, and we'd better protect these kids, and I've said that five years ago when we talked about going to expansion and going from the BCS to the current model right now, and it's just how many more games. Are we still playing a 12-game season? Are we still playing -- I don't know anything.

Again, I think we were getting into game week or into game day when that whole thing came out, so I don't know what's going on, and I haven't called to ask. I'm not calling the commissioner. I could care less right now. We've got a game to play.

**Q. With Kedon, you talked about they weren't finding a rhythm toward the end of the game but you feel like that's coming along. Part of that's natural, but what did you see from them over the weekend looking over it, working with his teammates, being a leader?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, it's hard to see all that. I mean, I just know he's comfortable right now. I think he came out of the game comfortable. Quarterbacks are always the leader. He was in my office last night talking about hey, what do I need to do better, how can I help, and all those things. So he's doing and saying all the right things right now.

He's a tremendous kid. If you spend any time with him at all, it's like, wow. We went from Kenny to Slovis, and those are two good ones, and we've got Nick Patti that's -- you've got to love him.

**Q. Ben Sauls converts all his kicks on Thursday; Vander Haar had that blocked punt, obviously. After watching the tape of that blocked punt, what could be cleaned up there, and thoughts on Ben Sauls going five for five?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, again, Sam with his first -- let's go to the good and then we'll go to the bad. The first thing is Ben Sauls did a great job. That's what we expected. That's what we've seen since spring ball is the consistency, the mental toughness, and kicking is not easy. I don't know if I'd rather be a quarterback or a kicker, okay. I don't know if I'm mentally tough enough to play either one. I'd rather just go hit somebody that got in my way.

And then going to Sam, Sam had a decent night. First time ever playing in a real football game. It was a great atmosphere for him to get into it.

But if you go back and watch every one of his punts, I think there was six of them, two of them he takes five steps and then a punt, okay. The other ones he took three steps.

He's been told to take three steps and punt the ball. There's a thing called "artificial hangtime" that you like to get -- the longer you can hold onto the ball and give our gunners a chance to get down the field -- we feel pretty good with our gunners and the guys running down the field, but he's supposed to take three steps.

On the one that he dropped down at the 3-yard line or 2-yard line, our guys milked it down to the 1, whatever it was, he took six steps to his left, really five steps and a swing leg, which is a sixth, which gets you blocked and causes problems. Again, on that block the protection wasn't as good. We can clean up some things there.

But he needs to get the ball off. We didn't tell him any artificial hangtime, just get the ball off. Give us a chance to go down and cover the punt. That's what he didn't do right. He apologized right after the game, like, Coach, thanks for not benching me and all that. He's a great kid, and he made a mistake, and we were able to survive it.

**Q. You're a touchdown underdog at home. Is that something you've discussed with your group?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Not yet. Not yet. Didn't know until I found out about it a minute ago. Again, it doesn't matter. Whoever sets these odds, who knows. You guys are gambling? I'm not a gambler. Five points, seven points, underdog. I like being the underdog. I will share it.

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