

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

Monday, September 12, 2022

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Obviously a disappointing game on Saturday. Very similar to what my thoughts are after that game. I really thought our kids played with a lot of energy, emotion, passion, really good effort, for the most part, across the board. Made some big plays in all phases of the game.

You look at just special teams, which you don't usually see big time plays especially. You see it on offense and defense, interceptions, but to have a blocked punt and us not be able to scoop and score right there and get zero points from it. Then we got a muffed punt return, which the guy dropped it and we're supposed to stay in front of him, and Byron did a great job getting down there and getting on that ball. P.J., whoever the gunner was, tackled the returner so he couldn't get back on it.

But those were big plays in just the special teams, let alone on offense with some of the explosives. Izzy was good. Obviously the hurdle touchdown. Defense, we played hard all day and I think held an explosive team to three explosives the entire day. Our goal was to hold them under four. We had three. But three turned out to be too many, and we didn't score enough points to win the football game.

So it was disappointing, but like I said, we put that thing to rest last night and here. I hate even talking about it the next day, but we're moving on. We've got a great Western Michigan team coming in, or going up there, I guess, into Kalamazoo.

We've got a challenge on our hands. They're well coached, and Lester does a great job. Jeff Thorn, new OC, came from over in Illinois, from a Division III school over there. Lou Esposito, their defensive coordinator, has been there. Does a good job. They do a lot of things similar to us.

There will be some carryover from what our offense sees every day in practice with what they do coverage-wise and front-wise. So there's some good things as far as that goes.



Q. What do you see in the offensive line after two games?

PAT NARDUZZI: When you look at it, like we got better. Sometimes, again, let's just go to the play before the half, and I know where you're going with it because I think maybe you guys asked this question just about the O-line and the protection.

Sometimes our O-line has got to get us out of it. Sometimes our quarterback has to get us out of a bad play and redirect protections or whatever it may be.

On the play before the half we should have the tailback staying in to protect him, and we didn't do that.

But O-line overall, I mean, you go back and look at the tape and you watch from the end zone, like we're creating some holes for the offensive line, or for the running backs, not just on Izzy's big runs, on ones that we throw RPOs.

Like if we let it go and let it ride and hit it off the tailback, go look at overtime and see what it looks like. It's like hand the ball off and let's go.

But we didn't hand the ball off. We tried to throw it and didn't throw it very well when we tried to. So there's some things like that that you don't really see that we see in a coaches meeting.

I think our O-line has done a solid job. Is the protection, should it be better? Yes. There's times that you're hot off a guy and going to throw it and you're going to take a hit, that's what quarterbacks do. But that's part of the game. You see it everywhere. You see it in the NFL. You see it in other games.

Q. How do you assess your wide receiver group? Jared Wayne played really well. What about the other guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: Jared Wayne plays really well. We knew that in the summer. He's the leader of that group. Jared Wayne has played outstanding. He really has. He's the guy. We kind of knew that back in the summer. He's the leader of that group. The other guys have had opportunities. We obviously played a lot more three



wideouts in the game Saturday afternoon, and we've got to step up. We've got to make more plays.

We've got opportunities to catch the ball, and we've got to make it. If you look at the game in a nutshell, we missed two field goals. We give them a freebie at the end of the half. I mean, there's a nine-point difference right there.

Take in account we think there's a flag because someone gets wrapped around the waist across the middle. They throw the flag, they pick it up. We think there's a flag, so we've got a free play. We throw it down the field, hits the receiver in the hands, and it gets dropped. Someone from over there, E.J. comes down and scoops it up.

Same thing happened again. Game of inches. M.J. gets an interception and his heel is out by an inch. It's something you think about. It's one of those games, for whatever reason.

Nick Patti has a great touchdown run. You guys watched the tape. I thought Jared Wayne not only caught the ball well, ran with it well after catches. I thought he blocked really well too. Put it that way.

Q. I'll take this. What's the status of your quarterback room at the moment?

PAT NARDUZZI: Like I always say, guys, I'm not talking personnel. On Monday we all know what we know. I know nothing. How about that?

Q. What about the No. 3 quarterback in competition? You said in camp it was unsettled. Who was your No. 3 quarterback on Saturday?

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say it's still unsettled. I would say it's unsettled. Kyler's been good. Nate Yarnell has been good. Nate Yarnell gives us most of the -- probably two out of three team periods Nate's given us a look.

Because he's done it before, that's the guy we pick. Like defensively we want that guy. So he's played more ball than Kyler has as far as just playing ball.

Derek's paying attention and locked into the offense because he's on that end. I would say it's a toss-up who the third guy would be.

Q. Speaking the quarterbacks you're going up against, the guy you recruited when he was in high school here in this area, what have you seen from him on film in his first two games from Western Michigan as a starter?

PAT NARDUZZI: Salopek is a good football player. He was accurate with all his short passes he did throw in the game. He moves well. He's tough. I think he's a tough guy. And he operates the offense. I think he's real coachable.

When you watch him, from everything we gather, just a very coachable guy who's going to do it exactly the way they're supposed to do it, and I think that's what anyone could ask for in a quarterback to operate the offense. He does a nice job.

They're very similar to what they were a year ago offensively. He's done a nice job so far in two games.

Q. (Indiscernible) at the end of the first half. Did you think about taking a knee with 21 seconds left?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm a dumbass, Jerry. Yes, thank you. There's no doubt about it. We didn't put a returner back. We were really worried about it and you go back and look, that's the one -- you guys talk timeouts I think Saturday after the game. I certainly wasn't going to call a timeout at the end of the game. That's why we kneeled down in the fourth quarter and take it to overtime. We weren't going to take a chance and have something crazy like that happen there.

Even on that play, if we just throw it to Buggs in the flat wide open, if we just throw it there and take that, we're probably feeling pretty good right now. But that's not what happened.

Q. For the No. 3 quarterback spot, did that factor into any of the decision to keep Nick in the game? Just from where I was sitting he looked like he was pretty -- he was playing on one leg the last 15-plus minutes.

PAT NARDUZZI: It didn't look that bad from the videotape I saw. You guys maybe make it worse than it was. First of all, Nick's tough. Nick doesn't like to get hurt. Nick's going to say, I'm good, and we're going to believe what Nick says.

If he's not good, we're going to pull him out of there for health and safety reasons. I don't see what you guys see just from watching the game tape. On tape maybe in between snaps; we don't watch that. You guys are watching the in-between. We're worried about getting the next call and personnel. We he was out there he moved around a lot. We weren't moving the pocket or running naked or anything like that with him, so we knew we didn't feel that good.

But that had nothing to do with if we had a third ready to

go. But third team guys aren't getting a lot of reps during the week. Second team aren't getting many reps, to Nick Patti's defense as well. It's tough to get everybody reps. Just like in the bowl game, it's tough to get everybody reps.

Q. I'm not sure if this question violates your injury policy.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes, it does. Next question.

Q. Was Rodney at the game?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes.

Q. Coach, you've obviously spent a number of years in the MAC. How has that level of football changed from then up until now?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think it's changed a lot when you look at their depth charts. You look at the depth chart here, we've got transfer from Sam Houston, transfer from Western Illinois, Youngstown State transfer, Wisconsin transfer, Pitt transfer, BC transfer. That's just on the offensive roster.

On the defensive roster, VMI transfer, East Carolina transfer. Let me see here. Purdue transfer. Pitt transfer. Illinois transfer. St. Frances transfer.

So it's changed a lot. With open and transfer, I was telling a recruit the other day, the portal has opened up. I think everybody's getting stronger. I think you're seeing some of these group of five teams beat people because they've got a stronger roster than they had in the past.

Everybody is weeding out their roster, getting rid of the weak, and they're finding guys that are better than they lost. In the end, you've got guys not graduating, which is a bad thing.

People think the grass is greener, I'm going to get something else. Roster is stronger as a whole, but I think there are a lot of kids that are losing out on scholarships and education they that they were going to still have it and didn't have it.

So the weak are still in the portal, I think, if you do a good job evaluating. It makes everybody stronger, I think.

Q. Regarding Kyler, what do you like about his game, and how can he get better?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's smart, number one. He can operate the offense. We've got to trust he can operate the offense, like Yarnell. We know he's had the experience in

games. As you know, we lost two guys that have played in games before. We needed to get somebody just that had been in there, which it was needed. He's obviously got one year of eligibility. And he can operate.

His touchdowns to interceptions is like 42 TDs, three interceptions, something like that, just crazy. He threw for a lot. He's a leader. He's a great kid.

Q. Did the run defense make the kind of improvements you wanted?

PAT NARDUZZI: They really did. They make it hard. Obviously less than 100 yards and less than three yards per carry, which is what you want. But some of the harder runs are some of the quarterback draws.

Again, if you had to look at the weakest part of the whole show -- and I talked about field goals and nine points and interceptions and not interceptions and feet out of bounds, probably the only thing we didn't do a great job of is tackling.

And Hooker, I think he put on 15 pounds since last year, I think. He looked big out there, and he didn't go down easy. So we did not tackle the quarterback well. I think we had three sacks on the day. Should have had six, seven. We only had three. If we had four, I think the outcome's a little bit different, but you've only got three.

I think those are critical. We didn't tackle well. We've got to go take shots and make plays. Just wanted to make the play instead of make a big play and go make it for less yards. So there were some of those I didn't like. We've got to get it cleaned up this week.

Run game, shoot, and that's a team that can run the football. No, we played it a lot better. It was what it was supposed to look like. We need to have that kind of effort and attention to detail in the run game all the time.

Q. When you and your ACC coaches get together and talk about things, do you ever wonder why ACC played so many road games against non-Power 5 schools?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know who it is. Road games, I don't count those up. I just know what I've been told, and I try to stay out of it. Hey, it's either this or this, and I'll give my opinion.

I think back when this game was scheduled -- and nobody wants to go on the road, period. We'd like to have all of our home games at home, or every game at home. I think when it was scheduled, from my knowledge, that was kind of a landscape of college football is people weren't taking --

it had to be -- you weren't getting them.

You want to go play, let's just say Wisconsin on a home and home or you want to go play Mid-American or group of five school. Even with Marshall. We were supposed to go to Marshall in the COVID year. We didn't go and played the conference schedule.

Some of those things happened at that time in scheduling, and there was really no options. You look at it, and you'd better schedule out 15 years. Maybe we don't schedule out far enough to get it where there's options. At that point, when we're trying to get games and trying to get your schedule filled out, sometimes you're stuck with what you have.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Oh, yeah. It's either that or you want to go out and play UNLV at UNLV. Options are limited at times, but it seems to be coming back the other way now. So we hope to not have that anymore.

Q. What is it about Western Michigan's defense that can give you guys issues?

PAT NARDUZZI: They've got guys on scholarship. They're playmakers. They're about 40 percent pressure. They like to bring pressure. So we've got to block them up front. It comes down to protection, they see a lot of pressure, offense sees a lot of pressure against us.

Like I said, they're very similar to what we do. They're going to bring five. They're going to bring six. They're going to play short in coverage. They know how to defend that kind of stuff, so it's good. It will be a good football game.

They're well coached. Coach Esposito does a great job. They play hard. They play tough. And they'll be excited to be home.

Q. You mentioned the new OC there. Are they doing the same thing they were doing last year offensively?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, there's a lot of similarities. There's just more stuff. Again, they ran more RPOs against us last year. They ran more out of the pistol against us and not anybody else. So we'll obviously get prepared for that. But a lot of similarities.

Coach Lester, the head coach, is an offensive guy. I know he'll have his hands in the game plan this week. I'm sure he had it in last week and the week before as well. So he's going to have his opinions and thoughts and, hey, we need

to do this or try this.

So there's a lot of similarities offensively. That's why they hired him. The guy is very like minded like he is.

Q. Tough watch reviewing the game film from last year for you guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. I shouldn't say not really, every game is tough if you don't make a play. I haven't watched the offensive side of the ball, but I think everybody forgets we had three turnovers in that game. You ain't winning the game with three turnovers.

We got kind of torn apart a little bit, and we got to stop the run again. Everybody will get upset if they throw a slant route or skinny, skinny post or glance route, whatever it may be, five yard out or ten yard out route to the field, which we're prepared for all of them.

I thought (indiscernible) played a heck of a game, but we didn't stop the run well enough to go with that, and that was the problem back then. But I think our kids were like, I'm running in there, and then they're throwing it over my head. So they start to get -- but we'll make sure that doesn't happen this year.

Q. You guys had one touchdown on five red zone trips, whereas you had 3 for 3 the year before. Looking back, what do guys you have to clean up to capitalize on those opportunities?

PAT NARDUZZI: Got to make better plays and be crisp route runners, and really make better decisions down there. It comes down to that. Really, we had some plays -- and I know you guys don't get the end zone copy, but we had some plays that are there. We've got to finish the play. We've got to make the plays, and we didn't do that.

Q. You talked about last week how a lot of receivers were breaking off, like breaking off too early. There's some issues there with the time?

PAT NARDUZZI: We're better with our revolutions, our route running. We were better with the depth of our routes. Now, I shouldn't say all of them. All of a sudden we've got a tailback, maybe one, it's the skinny stuff or the hard post or skinny post, some of those still.

Again, I think that's part of new offense, second game. Again, it's learning situations for our kids. They're going to continue to learn how we want to do it and how it has to be done, and there's no wiggle room for it to be done any other way.

Q. You have a number of players back from last year. You were good last year bouncing back after losses. Do you see the same type of qualities with this group?

PAT NARDUZZI: Sure hope so. That's the plan. This is a total reverse from last year. Last year we were coming off an emotional win. I think our kids were feeling themselves. Now this year it's Tennessee then Western Michigan, it's Tennessee then Western Michigan. So it's a total different deal.

So we're going to see how our kids respond. They went through adversity on Saturday. I thought they handled it well. Now they're going to go through a week of adversity and we'll find out what happens Saturday night.

Q. I was going to ask, Jared Wayne looks like he's continued to polish his game a lot more from last year. What have you seen from him as a leader off the field that's stepped up his play?

PAT NARDUZZI: We talked about that in August. He's such an unbelievable young man, I'll tell you. He's a man. He's probably not even young anymore. He's an old man.

But he is a leader. He's the leader of that room, and we need him to even lead more. We've got to get those other young guys, those new guys to come -- they've got to mature a little bit faster than they are right now. We need those other guys to make plays if we're going to put them on the field.

Q. You played two four-hour games in a row. On Sundays do you see the effects of that?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. They're noisy as can be. So not really. I don't see any. They're noisy, I'll tell you that.

Like they weren't just sitting here like exhausted or tired. They're energetic still. They're kids. We would feel four hours, but I don't think they feel four hours.

Q. Just a follow up because I saw the expression you made when Jerry asked you that question. Are these games too long?

PAT NARDUZZI: There's a lot of reviews, a lot of officials hanging out together going, yeah, that was holding, but let's wipe it off. There's a lot of -- I mean, I've never seen so many in two games flags picked up off the ground.

I think they're getting long, yeah. A lot of plays. Forget the length. Again, our offense won the time of possession by ten minutes, I think. Again, I guess the team won it because, when you go three and out and have a

54-second drive, that helps the situation. We're running the ball and having long drives.

But the games are getting longer, I think. You'd like them to be somewhere in the 3 1/2, but a lot of indecision on the field.

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