

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

COACH NARDUZZI: Going into week five already. The season flies. Excited to really get into ACC play. Finished up a good weekend. When you go back, watch the tape, a lot of positives on the tape -- and really all three phases of the game -- there's always things you want to clean up. I think offensively we had 11 explosive gains and defensively we only gave up three, but like three too many.

I mean, as I told the defense, you like to have 15 or 20 on offense. But really the last three weeks, I think the first week our defense gave up five explosives against West Virginia, and then the last three weeks it's been three explosive. Our goal is to keep it under four, I believe, four or five. So good job there.

But just anytime you get a 63-yard run that just drives me nuts because we're built to stop that and shouldn't have a problem with that. But just details around the defense there.

So but again a lot of good things. We had 27 guys play on defense. I think it's the most we've had for the year. It wasn't just in the last series of the game which was a 96-yard, 17, whatever, play drive. And 24 guys on offense. We got a lot of guys work that we could take a peek at on videotape I think is good.

And again, ACC play, that's what it all comes down to. We closed the chapter on last week's game and we're headed into Georgia Tech. And they're coming in here at 8:00 on Saturday night.

Sounds like new leadership down there. And again, my thoughts go out. It's never easy. Geoff Collins is a great guy. I know you guys talk about the handshake, probably, but he's a good dude. He was mad at the officials. He's intense. He's a really good football coach.

You never like to see that happen to anybody, I don't care who it is, what their record is. He's got a family. You look at, he's done a nice job down there in the time he's been here. We were hoping he was going to get up to Pittsburgh at least once and come to Acrisure Stadium.



I don't know who the interim will be. I know Chip Long and Andrew Thacker run the offense and defense and those will be the main things. And we'll proceed as normal.

Q. How does a team, an opponent losing their head coach the week before you play, how does that change the level of preparation and things you look for when they might be rolling out a lot of different stuff or (indiscernible) a new interim coach you don't even know who it is?

COACH NARDUZZI: Changes a lot of things. We don't know. It's like going back to opening game of the season again, not knowing what they're going to do. But again I would imagine the offense is going to stay pretty similar. The defense is going to stay pretty similar with the effect that they had.

But you never know. There's going to be different things that maybe they're allowed to do that they couldn't do before. So you really don't know. And I've never been in that situation. So I don't know what the preparation will be like. I don't know their kids. I don't know where the focus will be.

But we're going to prepare for our first ACC game like we've got Clemson walking in the door. And it doesn't matter who the head coach is. They have a lot of good talent, talent level pretty good. They've got a lot of good skill guys at all positions.

Q. 27 guys on defense, Saturday; 24 on offense. Who are some of the rotational younger guys who stood out to you on film?

COACH NARDUZZI: I start off, Branson Taylor getting a lot of, he had 40 snaps I believe at left tackle. He's what we thought he was going to be. And he got out there in the action and played really well. And he'll continue to -- we've got to get him in the rotation, keep guys fresh. We were happy to see what he did.

Going into the defensive line, to watch Sean FitzSimmons, everybody sees the sack, but how did he do on the other plays? That's the key. But he was good in there. He holds own, he he's tough, he uses leverage and uses his hands well. He's a competitor. He's a Pittsburgh guy.



Good to see him do that.

The younger guys in the secondary did okay. I was not impressed with some of the things that happened back there, to be honest with you with some of the young guys that came in there. They're green. And they need more work. At least at the corner position. McIntyre was good. He got more reps on the hash. That's Jehvonn.

Offensively -- who else? I think that's about it. Gavin Thomson came in, got a nice catch. So it's good to just see him in game time, get a catch, okay, we can count on him. He's not going to catch it in practice and drop it in the game. Those are a couple that stand out to me.

Q. (Indiscernible) you have to clean up (indiscernible) deep passing game?

COACH NARDUZZI: Just again, you go back, watch the videotape. I'm not going to whine about them. But they've got to call penalties both ways. But it's inconsistency. Big thing I'll go back to is three big passes or three big plays in the game.

And anytime you hold a team -- we won't lose a game if we hold a team to three big plays a game. We won't. And so we can say the inconsistency. I don't like the PIs that we got. One is probably good call. One you don't agree with. But that's the nature of the game.

And there's some on us. If you're going to call them on us you better call it on the other team as well. There's things like that. But I'm not really worried about it. I'm just looking for better technique across the board at every position. Like I said, three explosives, not bad.

Q. I was talking about (indiscernible)?

COACH NARDUZZI: They took some things away. We're throwing the check-down for 18 yards. It's all decision-making. If you want us to force it up -- and you guys might ask about interceptions next Sunday -- Monday. So I mean, you take what they give you.

Slovis is making good decisions in the passing game. If they're playing deep -- they didn't want to get beat deep. Does that make sense? They didn't want to give up -- what were they doing? Playing different coverages and in turn we rushed for a few yards.

Unlike what last week we saw out of Western Michigan. So we're going to take -- it's called good decision-making. I'm glad Kedon is not out there trying to force a post or fade into coverage and throwing picks. Protect the football is a priority.

And when you've got Izzy on a check-down over here, throw it. There's a couple he missed here and there but for the most part -- he missed a slant to Bub down inside the goal line, which we ended up kicking a field goal. It was one of those drives.

But take what they're giving you. It will be different every week. It depends on what they're going to do.

Against us, we're going to stop the run. We're playing in a scrimmage today at practice we're going to the run and he'll have more explosives in the passing game. But don't throw it into coverage. Be careful what you wish for.

Q. When Gavin went down, Carter went in. Looked like he had a lot of key points for some big runs that you guys had, especially late. Now that you've had time to look back over the game what did you see that he was doing right for you guys?

COACH NARDUZZI: Carter, he's a great football player. I think we talked about it back in camp. You saw it after a couple of days. He's tough. He's got a great motor. And we're happy he's with us. And we've got to get -- Kai (phonetic) played solid as well. As a matter of fact had a nice block down when Karter Johnson caught the one pass, he had a nice block down the field and was finishing.

We hope to get Dylan Deveney back ready to roll eventually. And again getting that other tight end that's probably not on the two-deep, I don't know if he is, E.J., you'd like to change that thing around is Jacoby, done a nice job with the tight end spot as well.

Q. With all the injuries you've had, how big is it for someone like Izzy to step in and take on more of a workload in the early part of the season?

COACH NARDUZZI: Again is he taking on more or taking on the same? I don't know. We're going to hand it off to him. If we can run the ball we're going to try to run the ball. If they pack the box, then we're going to try to throw it as much as we can.

So it all depends. I think we got the ability to throw it, run it. To me it's not like we're saying oh Izzy we need you more than ever. Because again Vince goes in there, he's productive. Put C'Bo in there he's productive. It's a tribute to our offensive line when they do it. You put the game tape on and watch it, it's like, we're doing some good things. We still miss some things, there's some things we can still get better at that we're doing some good things offensively in the run game.

Q. Talked briefly about the offensive line given the head coach rotation there's actually been along that unit. How impressed are you that players can just kind of step in not really (indiscernible) especially with that running game?

COACH NARDUZZI: Like Jake Kradel has done a nice job in there. And then you saw Gabe Houy, No. 57 back a little bit. A little holding call here. And again I bet I think he got 15 plays and I don't think he had 15 plays in practice last week. We wanted to give him a three-play set or five maximum and get him out just to make sure we get his feet wet and get him out make sure he feels comfortable. But he'll continue to get more and more reps here. But the offensive line has been good. And Gabe has not gotten many reps coming back from the injury in the bowl game but he's back, ready to roll, and helping us out as well. We're excited about that opportunity. But the O line has done a great job.

Q. The situation at quarterback over all four games, has it been tough to get a feel for what the identity of what this offense is, kind of figure out what you guys can do, just because you played a game and a half without your starter?

COACH NARDUZZI: I think you saw in the Tennessee game, and in the West Virginia game what Keaton can do, at least for six quarters, I guess, until he got hit. So I think you can see what he can do in the passing game. And then he takes a week off. I think he already got an idea he can throw the football and he's accurate and all those things.

So what is the identity? The identity is what's someone giving you, I think. We'll see as the season goes on. But I think we can throw the football. We can run the football. I think we can do whatever we want to do based on what they're going to give you.

Q. That Saturday you said your team didn't have the emotion you think they needed to come with every Saturday. What do you think was the reason for that? And do you think that problem is solved now that they're in ACC competition?

COACH NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think so. Like I said, you're dealing with a bunch of 17, 18, 19 -- maybe I'm dead wrong too. I'm not a mind reader. I'm not in their heads. It's just something you get as a feel sometimes. And sometimes I've said it in the past before the game are they ready or not and you don't know and they go out and just kill it. I think a full stadium has something to do with it at times. I think it hurt us a year ago against western Michigan. Who wanted to come see Western Michigan come play or come

see the Rhode Island game, three home games in a row. You hear on the slate they'll be showing up certainly for Georgia Tech game I think ACC 8:00 game. But I think that has something to do with it. Who knows.

I mean, you don't know. I'm just guessing, but I know players love to play in front of big crowds. They want to go play and again our fans can certainly help us Saturday night for sure.

Q. How do you think your team has dealt with injury adversity the first few games?

COACH NARDUZZI: Every week it's something different. Something different. I think they've done a nice job. I really have. I forget the quarterback situation. We've talked enough about that in the past whether it was Nick or Nate. But just different positions.

I mean, the defensive end, four of our five guys didn't play Saturday. Four of the top five guys, speaking of injury. I tell you I was going to give you a heads-up if somebody is out indefinitely or out for the season. We've got two, Nate Temple out for the year and so is Rashad Battle. We hate to lose any of those guys. Rashad was really No. 4 corner, No. 3 corner, back big, tall, great matchup for big tall guys this weekend.

Nate Temple playing a lot of football as well, not only on defense but special teams, guy running down on kickoff and kickoff return and punt return team as well. Those are two guys that we won't see back this season, just for your knowledge.

Q. You mentioned the identity. In a weird way, was almost what happened with the quarterbacks a blessing in disguise because you had to rely on them a little bit more and you have been doing it when they know it's coming which seems to me indicative of somebody that can be effective regardless what the defense is doing?

COACH NARDUZZI: You're talking about running the ball?

Q. Yes. The injuries, the quarterbacks help get this running game --

COACH NARDUZZI: It really has. If Kenny is back there who knows if we run it at all. But it certainly has. We've got to rely on that. Let's go Izzy. Let's go O line and let's get it done which we felt we could do going through August camp. So that has given us an identity right now. But I still think the identity is to be 50/50 and be able to throw the ball too.

Q. See more people in the box?

COACH NARDUZZI: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We're gonna. That's what I said. Then we get to do other stuff. I would imagine Georgia Tech is going to load the box up for sure and then we get to --

Q. Your third down numbers are pretty comparable to where they were last year. And last year?

COACH NARDUZZI: Offensively or defensively?

Q. Offensively, 44 percent last year, 44 percent so far. Is that with the quarterback in his first year, (indiscernible) somebody well versed is that because the running game is going so good. You're facing more third and shorts?

COACH NARDUZZI: I think so. When you look at it. I think we're eight for nine on short last. I think we wore the belly out on that final one downside the goal line. But the fullback belly I should say for people not sure what I was talking about. Not my belly. And so we kind of wore that out a little bit. But the third and short, being able to get more of those instead of third down and 12s. Certainly helps you. The other positive thing I think I don't know when the last time this happened, might not be in my era here as a coach but we only had one negative play on the day offensively.

You talk about a TFL on the run game. A sack. We had zero sacks. I think Keaton got hit once. And that's pretty impressive. One negative play as far as run or pass situation is pretty critical. And that's a tribute to those down and distances when you're ahead in the sticks a little bit.

Q. After the game, Calijah said he thought you guys played well but not great on Saturday. And he acknowledged that there were some things to clean up. To have a player like him kind of take accountability for all of that and kind of put it out there that the team, the players don't feel exactly you're 100 percent there. How important is it to have that kind of accountability this season?

COACH NARDUZZI: It's big. Sometimes guys get a false sense -- and they hear it from me all the time. As a matter of fact I had to apologize last night for being a grumpy winner, because it's like they all count as one, and we should celebrate them all, to be honest with you.

And I do a crappy job at celebrating victories sometimes because you want it to be perfect. Like I told you guys, I told our guys last night, I think you can play up here. When you don't, it's disappointing. But it doesn't take from the

win or what our kids did on the field. Whether you're underhanded personnel wise or not we still want to get the same thing out of them.

Q. You're tied with John Michelosen for third most wins in school history. Did your dad and his coaching staff, did he ever talk about Michelosen?

COACH NARDUZZI: He didn't. It was so long ago. I wasn't born -- 1962. Yeah, he did coach with him. E.J. might have some stats on there. But I knew this was his first college job here with him.

But I don't know a whole bunch more other than that. There's not a whole lot of stuff in the books. But I think he was a GA, maybe freshman coach as well. And then he was off to Brown.

Q. Does it mean anything that you've moved up the charts?

COACH NARDUZZI: Not really, just means I'm getting old. Getting older. Been here a long time. It depends on how long it takes -- you've got to divide it by how many years you were there, I think. Doesn't really matter. It's about winning every week and going 1-0, that's a staff thing. That's a team, the team wins the games. We just get to watch them play on Saturday. So doesn't really...

Q. On-field movements, a lot of them come in and earn these roles early. (Indiscernible)?

COACH NARDUZZI: Again, we missed Jared last week. And those two guys made some plays. I like to see Konata make that one catch where he got hit. But even on that same pass, there was a route that could have been a little bit cleaner which would have kept that guy out of there.

As a matter of fact, we didn't get our back out of the backfield which would have kept that corner, and he could have been still running here. The tailback fell down in the backfield on that play over Daniel Carter on it. But it could have been a little cleaner, but we've got to make all those catches.

And even down in the red zone, he's got to make that catch. But I think every week they keep getting better and better. I really do. They're all new guys, and a new offense, learning a new offense. I think that will continue to come, and we'll have more opportunities to get them the ball as we move forward in the ACC.

Q. I know Jerry tried to get you zoom out, big picture it. I'll try to help him out. You mentioned a guy when you came to the podium who's had a shortish stay at

Georgia Tech and now he's out of a job. Danny, at the end of your third season you guys were, what, 5-7, in '17; is that correct?

COACH NARDUZZI: I don't remember.

Q. Kenny Pickett. I mean, I think you got an extension after that. Now you're at the point where you've got depth, where you're losing guys and the drop-off isn't as dramatic. Are you sort of at -- when you took the job, year nine or whatever it is, eight. Are you at where you thought you'd be in the program standpoint?

COACH NARDUZZI: Year seven you win a championship game you feel like you are, but every year is a new year, right? What you did last year doesn't matter. I mean you can take every year as a brand new year and you lose some good players to the draft or whatever it may be; to Name Image and Likeness, whatever it is. You lose some guys and you've got to replace them. You never know what you can be.

You can win a championship one year, win next year. And there's no guarantee in the business. The key is consistency in this room and our players getting the same information in coaching the heck out of them and loving the heck out of our football team. I think that's what we do. And we've got a good group that sits in here every day to coach, and I think that's key. I don't know if I answered your question.

Q. You mentioned last year, this is your first ACC game you're the only team defending champion in the conference. Does that come up at all this week, that you're defending? Do you feel you're defending something?

COACH NARDUZZI: No, not at all. They can't take it from us, can they. That trophy will be sitting out there. I think we talked about it in August sometime, early September. We're not defending -- we were the champions. That's over with.

It's 2022. And we're going to try to go repeat. I think our kids are excited about getting into ACC play. I felt a different vibe in here instead of talking about Rhode Island or how good they are. It gets real now, I think. I think our kids will be excited about that.

Q. [Why do you onside kick at that point?

COACH NARDUZZI: That's a great question. Why? This is the second time we've had it this year, correct? Okay. We kicked off from the 50, right? Again, it's just like what do you lose? It's called practice. It's just like, I told our

guys last night, get that kick in there. Getting -- we weren't trying to score any points. We were just going to run the ball anyway, run the clock out. It wasn't a matter active trying to run the score up on my alma mater. But it was just a matter of getting practice. There's different things we got in, we want to work them.

To me we get to see a run play, I told our guys last night, we can run this run play or this defensive coverage in front. We get to see it every day in practice and we get to see it in a game. There's things you work in practice every day and -- sometimes you work them, and as a matter of fact, put it that way, we've not been in our goal line defense yet this season.

I don't want to put it in versus an 11-person or three wideouts, but haven't been working goal line defense the entire season. We don't have any opportunity to get any work at it. We may get some this week but we get no opportunity to put it on tape and coach off of it because you learn from those.

It's in a game where we would never have done that if we did it from our own 35, ever. But we got to the ball at the 50, you don't lose much. And it's just one of those things that you have to do to put it on tape.

And same thing, it was great, do I want to get them kick an onside kick and have an opportunity to get it. But it's great to get that on film and you go God I trust Bub Means to catch that. That guy, it's all in his hands, can he catch it or is he going to go --

Not only do we have confidence as coaches that, hey, when we put our hands team out there and we have the guys on there. Then the guys -- everybody on their side made their blocks but Karter Johnson, kind of slid off, he's gotta maintain it.

But all those things can be coached off of real game tape instead of practice and never knowing is it going to work or not. So those are critical things that we can get on tape early because it could win you or lose you a game later on this season when they really, really count. Because these four games didn't count yet. They don't count. We're 0-0 right now going into the ACC playing, and there's things we still want to get on tape.

Q. (Indiscernible) said after the game that he's played with a lot of running backs that can burst out for 20 yards but not have that second-level speed like Izzy (phonetic) does. How unique is that speed or ability?

COACH NARDUZZI: He's unique. Le'Veon Bell was one of the best I've been around at Michigan State, and he

didn't have that burst that he's got. Four of his five touchdowns I'm not sure he got touched. He might have got tagged. But there was nobody in position -- it's not like he was breaking all these tackles.

That's a tribute to the offensive line. When you watch it, the music up front with the O line and how Daniel Carter is fitting in there and cleaning stuff up. I mean, it's some good stuff. And I haven't seen it for a while, a run game look like that.

Izzy is special. Like I said, Vince is special. Those guys got in there, too. Again when you sit there and say Vince looks real good and C'Bo looks good and we know Rodney Hammond has looked good and he'll look good in the future. When that's the case, you're also looking at your offensive line is pretty good too, and they're doing a good job.

Q. When you took the job, some of us have been in here a while, and you were one of many guys that have been through the door in the last four or five years before you got here. And you're here, do you have an appreciation for reaching this point in your career where you kind of brought stability to this program but also maybe to tell them what you did?

COACH NARDUZZI: No question about it. You're the head coach at Pitt. You take pride in what you're doing. This is my job. My job is to come in here, rebuild it. Create some stability as the head football coach here and win football games.

And that's what we try to do every week, go out and try to be 1-0. And you take pride. That's what you got hired to do. It's what Chancellor Gallagher and everybody did, Randy Jewell, when they hired me back in 2015, is to come do that. That's what your job is. When you accomplish your job -- and again that was last year -- you know, it's satisfying. That's what you work for. That's what our kids work for.

We all have the same goal in here. It's not just a head coach. It's the staff, we all work together on the whole thing. It's all of us -- it's we, we, and we all do it together. This guy can't do anything by himself. It's everybody. There's no question you appreciate the effort these guys put in to get what we, we, want.

Q. (Indiscernible). Should it say Pat Narduzzi and 8,000 other people, 110 wins.

COACH NARDUZZI: That's a good idea. I mean, ultimately I get all the whatever. E.J. probably won't get that down in the record books or whatever it is. But again

we know what it is. I hadn't made one tackle one catch, all I do is help every day try to do the best I can do. And that's the truth. Fact. Right? Just try to lead.

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