

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Head Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Okay. You guys ready to roll? It's been a couple weeks. I hope you guys all have forgot about Virginia Tech and moved on. But probably to just hit on it quickly because like I normally do.

Probably one of our better performances of the year where all three phases you felt clicked a little bit. And I still think we haven't played our best game of the year. So I think that's a good thing. I think we still have more.

I think our kids understand after watching the tape, we still have more. I think our attitude, our effort, outstanding. You love how our guys fight. There's always adversity in the game of football. We've made more -- we're going to create more adversity and make it harder on ourselves.

And so, it's good. And just getting prepared. You know, last week, went on the road recruiting a little bit. Prepared for Louisville at the same time as you're on the road.

And, you know, coordinators and myself had, you know, extra days in the office just to focus on football and really just kind of getting things together so when the coaches came off the road, we were head-on Louisville.

Obviously, Scott Satterfield does a great job. I believe he calls most of the offense. So he's been doing it for a while. So we've gone back and watched a lot of the 2020 game here during COVID when nobody else really saw that game except on TV. And, you know, they're really athletic.

Obviously, offensively, it starts with Malik Cunningham. You know, just a -- it's him. I mean, he's kind of like the Sims guy from Georgia Tech. He's athletic, he can run, he can throw. We've got to stop the run, you know, whether he's handing it off or he's running it himself. He's the key to the offense for sure.

And, you know, they got good backs. Tiyon Evans. They got Hudson, wide-out No. 0, who's their go-to guy. I think



he's got 29 catches.

And, defensively, again, really athletic. They can run. And, you know, they run a 3-4 a lot of times. So we'll see a lot of 3-4 front this week. It'll be a great challenge for us on the road.

8:00 o'clock. I think we're the 8:00 p.m. darling team on the road. Because I think we got North Carolina at 8:00 p.m., too. So I guess we're the only ones fit to, you know, run a game, I guess, at 8:00 p.m. It'll be the third one of the year next week. And, again, it'll be two in a row at 8:00 p.m. So, you know, we're ready to roll. Questions?

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm not telling you. (Laughing.) Yeah, I mean, put it this way Jay, you know, like, self-scout is huge. We try to self-scout every week, whether you can change things.

I think on open weeks, you know, we've been pretty good at going back and saying, Okay, what are we doing? What's it look like? What are -- you know, what are they looking at? But defensively, I can show you. You know, we do it every week.

You know, offensively, defensively, you know, you get deeper into it in an open week because you can. You know, got a tip from an old coach one time, he said, You know, you build tendencies and you break them in big games. And I think after six games, it's time to maybe break some tendencies, whatever they are.

Again, tendency to run the football, we're not going to break that tendency if we're good at it. I think all good teams have tendencies. And it's, like, Go ahead, stop it. That's the only way you're really going to break a tendency as far as what you do.

And, again, but we look at self-scout every week. It's a priority to know what we do, when are we doing it, what's our run pass on our first down, second down. What's it, you know, our run pass after, you know, on second down after an incomplete pass.

I mean, we look into everything. You'd be, like, I cannot believe you look at this. But we do. We look at a ton of



stuff.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm not going to tell you.

Q. How much do you do in a week in terms of doing new things, putting in new things? You know, you're midway through the season, you have a week off.

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, you can put new things in. You know, you can put new things in. But it's not going to be -- it's tweaking stuff, Chris, more than it is throwing this new concept in that the guys -- I mean, to me, offensively, defensively, you know, even special teams-wise, you throw in what you're going to do in spring ball, fall camp and then you refer back to it or you tweak it a little bit.

We're not going to come out and run the triple-option this week. You know, you don't put something drastic in it that the kids have no idea -- they haven't gone through to see how it holds up against a stout defense.

I mean, putting in new stuff and running it against the scout team and say, Boy, it looks great today. You're probably in trouble.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, I mean, that's a great question. I'd say it's maybe above average. I wouldn't say it's a winning effort every time. I'd say it's above average right now. And I think it can be better. And, again, he thinks it can be better as well.

And, again, it's -- you know, sometimes it comes down to maybe overcoaching stuff. I mean, sometimes we're -- put it this way: I think he's a pleaser. And I think he's trying to do everything exactly the right way. And sometimes I think he can overthink things.

So I think we just got to kind of let it go and maybe don't overcoach him as much and let him play football and let him do what he does.

You know, versus cover this, this, this. There's so many times -- as a quarterback, sometimes you can clever his mind with useless details. Instead of just saying, Hey, let him go play ball.

And maybe we can do a better job as a staff and he can do a better job at seeing stuff and so I think, you know, it's always twofold. We got to do a better job as coaches first. And then, you know, doing so much, maybe doing too much to the point where we got to keep it simpler, too.

Q. Obviously, Frank is going to break down the offense. And during the off-weeks, Randy's going to sit down with the defense. What's your focus today, Coach?

PAT NARDUZZI: I do both. You know, I'm going to do both. I'm going to be -- actually, I'm not going to put in schemes on offense. I'm going to be with the defense and make sure that, you know, how it's broken down, what it looks like. Hey, this is what we like to do. So I'm going to help more on defense because I can.

And my role I feel like on offense, to be honest with you, I'm the self-scout GA. I'm the self-scout. I'm looking at what we do every week. Trying to give them information as to what I see as a defensive coach what they're doing and what we can do better. And I've always done that, whether they listen or not.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: There are some designed runs. They'll run some, you know, zone read where, you know, the tight-end's hooking the end and the tailback is going to wrap up around, try to get up on your safety or your support player and it's a designed keeper. Which is a tough play to defend.

We worked on it last week, obviously, in practice. And we practiced twice last week on some of that stuff. But it's really -- I mean, the quarterback keepers, at least we're expecting run.

It's when he drops back and he's got threats out there at the receiver spot and the tight-end spot. And then you're in coverage and all of sudden he takes off running. That's what really scares you. And, again, they got designed quarterback draws, as well.

So, you know, there's the design quarterback keepers on the zone read, the draws or what you're -- that you really have to focus on this week. And we've really done a good job versus the draws.

So I think if they're watching the tape, they're going, Man, the D-tackles do a great job at, you know, of shredding, getting off blocks. They're doing a nice job there, but, you know, we always try to look at what the weakest -- what have we shown on tape that we have to be ready for.

But we haven't shown them really a ton of weaknesses. We showed a weakness with Jeff Sims when he dropped back to throw and he lost concentration for whatever reason and he's going, he's running. That's where we've

gotten hurt.

We took bad angles. We got to take good angles this week. If Malik takes off out of the pocket, we have to take good angles and expect where he's -- go where he's going to be, not where he is.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, that's a -- that's a hard question to answer. It's everybody. I mean, Izzy, just run. Okay, we'll tell Izzy what to do, where to go. Hey, we like this.

And as I say, coaches will coach, players will play. And we're going to do a good job of getting Izzy in a position where he can be successful. That's what we've done. He hits the hole fast.

We don't want Izzy thinking. But it's a coach's job to put him in a position to be successful. And our offense has done that. And we've done an outstanding job running the football, period. And we'll continue to do that.

You know, you look at it, and you go -- everyone wants to talk about, How's Kedon doing? And it's, like, you know, to talk about a run game and Izzy's performance last week would be, you know, bad on my part not to talk about how successful he's been, how well the offensive line has blocked and fullbacks and whatever, the tight-ends.

But everybody wants both, right? Last year, we don't have run game. You guys talk about the run game. This week -- this year, we're running the ball better than we're throwing it. We like him to be two-dimensional. We like to be great at everything.

Okay. But I know you guys aren't great at everything. Neither am I. But right now, we got a run game going. And I love the run game. And the clock is ticking. And if you can run it, I'll take that any day. That's what our guys are doing. It's a good thing. You guys, you know, doom and gloom. Like, why can't we throw for 400 yards every weekend? Like, I would rather rush for 400.

Q. (Question regarding Izzy.)

PAT NARDUZZI: He's gotten better. But it's a week by week thing, too. I think he had a really good week last week. And, again, that's what we talk about, consistency, is he's got to do it every week.

And he's been good in some weeks and some weeks he's not been. And, you know, different blitzes, different shows, different disguises by the defense. You know, he had great focus last week and stepped up and did some good

things.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, Tyler's been good for a couple weeks as we talked a couple weeks ago, you know, going into the Virginia Tech game. And then, you know, Shayne Simon did a great job. He practiced better.

I got text messages, like, Hey, Tuesday, great job. That's how we want you to finish. Shayne is such a -- he's a pleaser like Kedon. He's one of those guys that wants to do everything the right way.

Sometimes you just got to go hit someone in the mouth, you know, as a linebacker. And he's just so worried about doing everything exactly right, sometimes you just got to go play football.

And Shayne, you know, has kind of fallen into that being the new guy and just wanting to be a pleaser. To the point where last week in our practice it was, like, Shayne, start turning it loose. And he turned it loose and made some nice plays.

And then did an unbelievable job of coming in and playing Mike linebacker. At halftime, when we heard No. 7 is out, Oh, boy, this is going to be interesting. Because Shayne has not had a ton of sacks with Mike. He did an outstanding job of coming in and filling that role.

Because I didn't know what it could have been. It could have been a bad second half. But Shayne Simon did a heck of a job in there, mentally more than just the physical part.

Q. Not that's it something you would look at going forward and maybe give Rozzy a chance at outside?

PAT NARDUZZI: Have you been in our staff meetings? You may see him on the outside. You never know, Chris. Yeah, he likes it out there, too. If you ask him, he's like -- he called it, That guy gets to make a lot of plays out there. So it might be something you see.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't have any spies. You guys are my spies. So maybe you guys can do some digging. You know, I think it's -- I think he's in the concussion protocol like a lot of quarterbacks around the country.

And I'm sure they'll be careful with him. I'm sure he'll be careful with himself. He's got a career at the next level. But it's been, you know, one, two -- I mean, this will be



three weeks. I think Malik will be ready to go.

I'm sure he's -- I'm sure he'll be ready to go, if that's what it is. And I'm not the trainer. I'm not the doctor. I'm just a coach knowing that we're probably going to see Cunningham.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: We are, we are. We got some guys getting healthier. Speaking of injuries, we got one bad news, you know, from a guy that has tried for the last, really, three weeks to bounce back and play. This guy wants to play bad.

And I really feel bad. We've done everything in our power as trainers and doctors to try to get him as close as he could and try to get him back on the field to play. And, again, his future is important, as well.

But Carter Warren will be out for the rest of the year, speaking of injuries. So there will be some bad news. Jerry loves it. There he is, typing it up.

But again, Carter Warren, I mean, I can't thank him enough for all the efforts he's made. It's sad to think that he's played his last ball game, you know, in that Pitt uniform. I don't even want to think about it. He didn't want to think about it.

That's why he's tried so hard. He's tried to rehab it, tried to get back. It doesn't feel good enough. And we need to get him prepared for his next journey in the NFL. It's only fair for him to be able to do that. So disappointed to hear that.

But like I said, he's -- it's been painful for him to even, you know, make that decision. It's, like, Carter, you got to -- we got to make a decision here soon. You can't just keep week by week. We need to go, you know, get yourself better.

Q. So with Carter out, who are the guys -- I know Branson played quite a bit of snaps at left. Will it be him taking over at left tackle?

PAT NARDUZZI: It'll be him. I mean, we have a three-man race right now. I mean, you got him, you've got Gabe and Goncalves. Those are your three guys -- the three-man rotation.

And Baer's got to be ready to go. He's one play away. We'd like to red shirt him. We think he's going to be really good. He's gong to be a lot better next year than he is this year.

But Ryan Baer is another guy that, you know, that's getting reps every day with the ones and the twos just to get him prepared. Because you never know when you're going to -- you know, you're one snap away from him being a guy that's playing significant football for you.

Q. We talked about Malik Cunningham, with a guy like him and his ability to run it and throw it. Are you noticing those more the kind of guys popping up -- like, more 50/50 with running and throwing?

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, you take the ACC and compare it to some other conferences in the country, I mean, the quarterbacks we're seeing, I mean, the Wells kid last week could run. I mean, every week it's someone that can really beat you -- you know, beat you with their feet. I mean, every week, it's another guy.

And again, you know, not to look ahead, but just watching the guy for next week, Maye can run. I mean, all these guys can run and beat you with their arm and their feet. So it's what the ACC is right now.

I watched the Duke game -- you know, Duke/North Carolina, I mean, Leonard can run. All these guys are able to make plays with their feet. It's something defenses, you know, have to be prepared for.

Q. (Question concerning tackles.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't remember if he did or not at left tackle. But, yeah, he's -- he can play left tackle. Yeah, Matt can play both. Matt will be the swing guy, if anything. Gabe would be right. We wouldn't mess -- you know, Matt would definitely be our swing guy.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, when you look at -- I think someone asked me a question about -- like, last week about Virginia Tech not being a very good run defense going into the week, I was like, They were ranked 24th in rush defense. That was a stout defense. And you just look at how we wore them out. Okay?

Because you take the first three plays of the game, we didn't -- we went that way instead of that way, getting awful field position. You just try, you know, to get out of the hole in the first series with the awful field position.

But, you know, the offensive line has done an unbelievable job. I can't tell you it's their best performance. I mean, everybody sees records broken, Oh, that's our best. I think there's been some really good performances this year on the offensive line in the run game.

You know, they really have not let me -- I go back to Western Michigan. That was a heck of a performance with, you know, 12 passes in all the junk they threw at us upfront. So every week is a different challenge.

I mean, you face a physical, strong, Virginia Tech front last week, and then there's the other junk defenses people are throwing at you. And that's the mental part of it and the physical at the same part. So I think it's a little bit of the both.

But, you know, the run game takes times just like the passing game to get going and sometimes you have to run it for a couple yards or a couple TFLs, but you have to keep calling them and trusting them.

And that's what we haven't done in the past and that's what we're getting to now. So, like, you know, it's not like our kids went to go see, you know, the Wizard of Oz to get a run hard or whatever it may be. It was -- like, it was all in them.

What do you get good at? And it's hard to get the good at everything. I mean, same thing, a lot of people are going to say, You know, what runs are you going to do?

I mean, anybody that has, like, 15 favorite runs and you're running outside zone, inside zone, counter, you know, they usually aren't good at it. But we're trying to select what we do, how we do it and get good something.

And you can't get good at too many runs, too many passes. You just got to kind of keep it simple and do what you do and do what you do best. That goes back to Jerry's self-scout stuff.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, he's getting ready. He's going to start getting ready as of today. But, you know, it's where his focus is going now. And, again, that decision was just made yesterday. He's been fighting. What makes him a great prospect, he's smart, he's got the measurables. He's long, got long arms. And, you know, he's athletic. I mean, what else do you want?

What else -- he could pass protect last year, he showed he could pass protect when everybody in the stadium knows it's going to be a pass. And he's been able to run block this year. I wish he would have got a couple more games in. But unfortunately that's not the case.

Q. Did you get a chance to watch any college football Saturday?

PAT NARDUZZI: Are you kidding me? Everything. I watched everything. I mean, I got my iPad in front of me. Watched a lot of Louisville. But I watch every game I can.

I'm lucky -- I'm the luckiest guy in the world. Okay? I don't know how lucky you guys are. I'm lucky because I've got four kids and a wife that loves football.

Even when I go home last night, they got Sunday Night Football. I don't even have to say, Hey, can you change the channel? They already got it on.

Like, I am fortunate. And they're probably as addicted to watching ball as I am. So Sundays, my oldest daughter's making all these fancy pizzas. And, I mean, it's unbelievable. It's a good day. A good day in the Narduzzi house.