

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference



Pitt 19, Syracuse 9

PAT NARDUZZI: Great game, great team win by our football team. A lot of good things. Still a lot of things we can clean up. I'm still not sure we've played our best game.

We've found a way to just do some crazy things at times. That's kind of who this '22 team has been. A lot of great plays.

I thought the defense played outstanding. They were all over the place, besides that one last big pass, thrown to the Gateway guy, I believe. It was a heck of a game. Had some great plays in the game.

Obviously we're without our tailback, Izzy. Expect him back ready to roll next week, and I loved how C'Bo ran. Obviously Rodney was good, and we were able to do it with another guy out.

Questions?

Q. After giving up four touchdowns in the fourth quarter the last two games, what did you see out of your defense today in that fourth quarter to close this game out?

PAT NARDUZZI: The coverage was really good. That one long pass wasn't very good, but the coverage was great. I saw more linebacker PBUs. We didn't do that, we lost our focus a week ago. Just with the quarterback scrambling, our D-line did a great job putting pressure on the quarterback.

Kancey played four quarters, and they struggled to block him even when he played defensive end out there in the one package.

They got after the quarterback, and that was the difference. Again, obviously it's a different team. It's a top-20 win, I can tell you that, but I don't know if it's the caliber of a North Carolina. You can grade that the way you want to

grade it. It wasn't North Carolina, it was Syracuse, and again, a really good football team.

Q. How close was Izzy to playing today?

PAT NARDUZZI: He didn't practice this week. I thought Tuesday, taking a day off on Tuesday, he was sore, and I figured -- Izzy heals really well, really quick. Usually we've got a yellow jersey on him on Tuesday just to take it easy. Wednesday he didn't go and he said he wasn't feeling any better, so I felt like on Wednesday that he wasn't going to go. Then if you don't practice on Thursday, it's hard to put a man out on the field that's not physically ready to go. I'm not going to do that.

I think he probably could have gone if we wanted to, but he's smiling and he's happy in the locker room and we got a win without him, and he'll be -- the thing I said to him is you're going to be really healthy for this week. So he's not going to be sore on Tuesday.

Q. I know the offense didn't drive down the field and score in the fourth quarter there, but compared to what it did in the last two fourth quarters, just getting to see them put together a decent drive and kill some clock and really ice the game, how nice is that for you and your staff?

PAT NARDUZZI: It was good. Again, that's a good defense now. That's a really good defense that we played today, top 20 I believe in most categories, so it's a good football team.

We moved the ball a lot better in the first half. I'm not sure why in the second half, but they had a lot of guys in the box. As you guys could see, they were down there. They're a good football team.

Q. Other than taking a big risk in the first quarter, how did Kedon play?

PAT NARDUZZI: Besides that big risk -- he got hit as he threw it, and I think he was throwing is what he told me. He didn't get it far enough out of the end zone. But I thought he played solid. We'll go back and look at the tape, but I think it was good. He played good enough to win the football game.



Q. Did you consider a quarterback change after the early Slovis interception?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, not even close, no.

Q. Jared Wayne, back-to-back 100-yard weeks, most catches and yards in his career back-to-back weeks, is that anything you guys are doing to make it so that he gets that production, or is it just the game?

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, we know he's a guy we can rely on. Kenantae had a nice game, as well. I don't think we were able to get the ball to Bub today, but that's just how it rolls. But Kenantae had a nice bubble out there where he had some great blocking and took it down the sideline. I thought he was going to score; he's pretty fast.

But Jared Wayne is a football player, as we know, and he's been our go-to guy, he's our deep-ball guy, and he's a playmaker. I know Kedon can trust him and I know the offensive staff trusts him.

Q. You talked last Saturday about how when Calijah got ejected, the rest of the defensive line didn't get enough pressure on Drake May. What you did see from the rest of the defensive line tonight aside from Kancey, who obviously also had a big game?

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, I think they played angry. Coach Partridge did a great job of just getting them ready to go today and got after them this week in practice. They showed up today. They played a little angry today. The performance a week ago was not who we are, and again, give them credit.

Again, we're going back seven days, but they were ready to go today.

Q. How do you explain --

PAT NARDUZZI: They max protected all day, too, now. They put 47 and 81, those tight ends, they just max protected all day. They were blocking with six and we were rushing four to get most of those sacks. It wasn't like there was a bunch of blitz sacks. We almost had a blitz sack on that last scramble by the quarterback for a 1st down when Calijah had the sack. He had him wrapped up, and he just got tackled from behind. I've never seen anything like that before, but he got tackled from behind. Wow.

Q. Another running back, C'Bo, how do you explain him all of a sudden --

PAT NARDUZZI: It's not all of a sudden. You've got Izzy,

you've got Rodney who was out. And C'Bo is a good football player. He's got some juice to him. I just thought -- he plays in games like he practices, and again, you've got deep position there.

He's got another year. I hope he comes back because I think that guy can be really, really good. He started off slow in camp, but C'Bo is a football player. He's tough, he's physical. He's just got some juice to him. That drive was all him. Obviously besides that third quarter drive, he did a heck of a job.

Q. Can you talk more about Rodney; what's it say about a guy who has this great game to start the season, then watches his teammate become one of the best running backs in the country as he's on the sideline with an injury. He comes back, can't really get into a rhythm, but then when he's called upon tonight, to run the ball 28 times and really carry the offense, he's out there and he executes. What's that say about him?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, it's another good football player. You'd like to have another guy to hand it to. Your tailback is not going to stay healthy all year, just like some other positions aren't going to. You'd better have good backups.

Again, we see Rodney as a starter, period, him and Izzy, and if he didn't get hurt, he'd have had a heck of a lot more carries than he's had so far to this point. Like I said to him before the game, this is what you've been waiting for. He's been wanting more carries.

It's hard to take Izzy off the field what he's done this year, but 125 yards rushing, 28 carries, and he was a load in there, like we know.

Q. Deslin goes for two and a half TFLs, two and a half sacks; is this the best you've ever seen him play?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know if it's the best I've ever seen him play. It's maybe the best he's played this year. We'll look at the tape again to make that decision, but Deslin is great.

We've played some athletic quarterbacks this year, guys. You go down the list of who we've played, those guys have avoided some sacks, and you give the quarterback some credit through the years.

But Deslin has played well. I don't think it's the best he's played. He's a good football player.

Q. The way the defense performed tonight, is this one

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of the best defensive performances in terms of just physically dominating the interior that you remember?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, no. We've had some dominating performances since I've been here. It's been eight seasons in. That was a good performance. I've seen better, I think. I don't know what the yardage was. I don't know the best yardage since I've been here. But it was a good performance.

I'm writing down every series; there was a lot of -- three-and-out a lot. That first drive they went down the field with penalties. We had a facemask. We had a PI that I thought was whatever. But we kind of gave them some yardage in penalties on the first drive just to get their field goal. But to hold them to three field goals, that's good defense.

Q. This is the second year in a row that you guys have faced Sean Tucker from Syracuse when he's been averaging over 90 yards per game, dominating the rest of college football, and he comes here and you guys hold him to less than 20 yards rushing. What did you guys have to do? What did you see from your guys to take on the challenge of facing an athlete like that?

PAT NARDUZZI: Again, it's called execution. We talk to our guys about not playing four quarters, playing one play at a time and playing every minute to win it.

Our guys, we didn't focus too much on just the fourth quarter and what we've got to do in the fourth quarter to win it, it was just like one play at a time and move on to the next and go. That's what our guys did today.

We had that crappy punt in the fourth quarter and it's like, are you kidding me, and our defense went out there and went three-and-out and they went to kick a field goal and missed it. Again, got a couple TFLs or whatever on that series; that's dominating defense. That's what we expect every weekend. You've got to pay attention to details.

Q. Speaking of punters, I think you guys used three different ones. Was there a certain scenario; it seemed like you maybe liked Vander Haar when you're trying to pin deep there, and Junko to boot it further downfield?

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, obviously Cam had the ugly one. It was a little bit of a high snap by Byron, but he got it down; there was no pressure. He's just got to punt the ball. That was ugly.

Junko came in and did a great job, but Sam was our -- he's been our sky punt guy, that again, didn't have -- he was really 1 for 1. The other one was not very good. We had a

penalty on that play. Again, that punt returner did a great job. It looked like he was catching it, and Carter Johnson hit him, and I was kind of like, what are you doing, but looked at the replay, it was a great fake. I think he thought he had the ball, and he was doing what PJ O'Brien did at the end there.

But I guess we can't fall for the fakes. But he was just trying to make a play.

Vander Haar has been our sky punt guy. He's been excellent at it all year. Last two weeks we've evaluated Cam just on how his sky punts were. We do a big sky punt period on Fridays, and we just said we're going to go with -- that's what he's good at right now. Dropped one at the 1, which was good.

Q. In addition to of course we know about Rodney, but what about his backup, C'Bo had 43 yards and a touchdown?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, that one drive C'Bo had, I was so happy for him. It's not easy sitting there watching Izzy, watching Rodney. He had his opportunity to go out there and show, hey, I can deserve a package, I deserve some more carries, and again, it's hard to dish them all out.

Somehow we've got to get three tailbacks on the field at one time, I guess. But he's tough, he's physical, and I love how he practices every day. He plays the way he practices every single day.

Q. A lot of the guys in that locker room have won a lot of games with you, but were they more excited than normal after this one considering the rough month of October you guys just went through?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. I mean, it was the same as normal. You're upset when you lose and you're happy when you win. I didn't see any more excitement in there. Same, moving on to the next.

Q. What was the thought process behind that trick play where Jared threw that interception?

PAT NARDUZZI: Oh, boy. Should have thrown it away. They were in zone coverage. I won't get into details, but it was -- he's got a great arm, too. He throws it long and outside, then we've got a shot. We got in the red zone twice and didn't come away with points, so we moved the football, but it was not good. Just put it on me; blame me.

Q. Six-sack performance where you guys allowed just 25 yards rushing. Can that be the spark that your defense needs to get back into playing the type of

aggressive football that wins you guys football games?

PAT NARDUZZI: I hope so. I hope it gives them a little bit of confidence and they get their swag back as far as getting the quarterback, you hope. But next week is another game against a Virginia team that almost knocked off North Carolina today. I think they got awful close at the end. I don't know what the final score was, but we've got another battle. We've got to go on the road, noon game, got an hour drive. We're already thinking about the next -- I think we're staying in Richmond, got an hour drive to the stadium because there's no hotels in Charlottesville. But just working on the next.

Q. Ben Sauls, only hit him once today, made a 43-yarder, but he's perfect on PATs. He hasn't had that many pressure situations, but just what is there to say in terms of his consistency given he hasn't that many opportunities so far to kick field goals?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, whether we ask you to kick one or kick two or three, we expect you to make them all. He's been 100 percent here in the last few weeks. He's done a great job. That's what we saw all camp.

He was a guy that came in as a scholarship player and got beat out by Sam Scarton, a walk-on, and then he came back and told me the other day, I needed last year to be who I am this year. Again, sometimes you've got to get knocked down a little bit, and nobody is entitled to be a starter just because you're a scholarship player. Sam did great job for us last year, and he's done a great job for us this year.

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