

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, last evening, some things happened down in Charlottesville that -- you know, about 10:30, and we met with our guys last night at 7:10 and then probably until 8:30, and you just think they probably did something very similar to what we did in our meeting, and then let the guys have dinner and probably rolled out of there -- what happened after that, I don't know, but I'm shocked, obviously. Don't even care to talk about that game. I think we just kind of put it aside. I'll answer any questions afterwards if you have to.

But our hearts and our prayers go out to the city of Charlottesville, University of Virginia, Coach Tony Elliott and his football team. They've got to be going through it right now. I can't imagine losing three guys in the room here and can't even imagine what's going on down there.

It's unthinkable. You go from playing a football game to that.

Again, our prayers go out to everybody down there that's involved in this. It's sad.

Move on to Duke, I guess. Again, got a good football team. Obviously Coach has done a great job there.

Offensive coordinator Kevin Johns has done a great job there, as well. Had a lot of experience with him. When you think about football games, we've played him a lot. I think the last time he was coordinating and working at Northwestern was in the Pinstripe Bowl, so we've gone back and watched that whole game. Our last two years at Michigan State, played him when he was at Indiana. He was the offensive coordinator, receiver coach, quarterback coach; he's done a little bit of everything there.

Obviously have watched those games and pulled a lot of stuff, a lot of very similar stuff to what they're doing.

The same thing on defense. They've got experience there, too. It's someone we haven't played before. They're a good football team. They're playing well. We'll move on to questions.



Q. Does what happened in Charlottesville put things in perspective about football and life?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. I mean, it always does. I think we talk about it all the time, it's more than just football. It's your faith, it's family and football, football being last. When you see something like that happen, it hits -- we know it happens a lot more, with school shootings, wherever it is, in Texas, in Florida, right here at the synagogue in Pittsburgh.

You just got done playing a football team, and the Davis kid, the big tall wide out that didn't play, I remember seeing him right after the game and shaking his hand and saying, hey, get healthy.

But it's just a -- that puts things in perspective.

Q. Have you talked to your team since you found out about the incident?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, no, today is our kids' days off. Monday is a day off for those guys. They come in academically, but I've talked to a few guys on the team individually just as they're around the office this morning, but not as a team.

Q. What will you tell them or what will you address with them?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know. I'm just glad -- I think as I walked in here, they got the guy, and obviously a former football player, but I don't know. I'll have time to think about that tomorrow morning.

Q. You're a leader of young men. You talk to them about football but also about life. How do you address that when they were just playing this team and some of the guys they were just up against, something like that happens; that's tough to process.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. You know, growing up and maybe the same for you guys, lost one player after a workout at Northern Illinois. It doesn't happen very often in all my years. Lost my dad in '88. That was traumatic.

Then you think about what Virginia football team is going



through, that's a brother in that room. It's just hard. Just can't even fathom what those poor kids are going through.

It's tough, and that's what we talk about being safe and being around the right people and surrounding yourself with good people. It's unfortunate.

Q. You talked about Duke; obviously a really strong football team. They're kind of on the rise under Coach Elko. What's the difference you're seeing in that team from last year to this year?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, the quarterback is playing at a high level. They're running the ball well. They like to run it. They're going to throw RPOs, so we're back into the RPO game which we haven't seen for a few games here. We did a good job stopping it early. But they do a great job running the football.

I think they're very sound on defense. They are going to make you earn it. They're not going to go crazy with something just out of the blue, so you're going to see a sound defense all day with what they do. They mix up their coverages.

But they're going to run the football. I would imagine it'll be a short game. We're going to run it, they're going to run it, and two and a half hours the game will be over, so by 3:00 you guys can be on your way and go see your wife and kids and your families. So they like to run it.

They're just a good football team. Again, Coach Cutcliffe is a heck of a coach, as we all know, but I think Coach Elko has instilled some life into -- just different. Sometimes change is good, I guess. So they're just doing different stuff on defense, and they're having fun on offense, and they're really smart. They're going to come out, they're going to take all the play clock, they're going to clap three or four times before they snap the ball. We've got to make sure we don't jump offsides on the first clap, the second clap or the third clap, and they're going to try to steal as many signals as they can to try to get them in the perfect play they possibly could.

Q. We asked last week about some of the bigger surprises in the ACC. You talked about Drake May being one of the bigger surprises as far as individual players. Would you say this Duke team is the biggest surprise as far as achievement as a team, as a whole from where they were at?

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say no question. I'm putting my vote in for Coach Elko, Coach of the Year in the ACC. I think he's done a phenomenal job. First-year head coach coming from Texas A&M. I've known him for a while. He's

been in the ACC for a while. He was at Wake Forest prior to that. He's a great coach, an old defensive guy. They're tough. They're gritty. They're physical, and they play with an attitude right now. We'll have our hands full Saturday.

Q. You said they're going to try and steal as many signals as they can; is that something you've seen on tape?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I just kind of know from the years, back to when I was a linebacker coach back in whatever it was, at Northern Illinois when we played Northwestern. He was there a long time ago. They may be the masters of it. So we'll be very detailed and specific about what we do and how we do it.

Q. Don't most teams try to do that?

PAT NARDUZZI: They do, but they might be the masters of it; let's put it that way. They might be the best at it.

Q. This is an opportunity to recognize the seniors Saturday. What can you say about the senior class?

PAT NARDUZZI: With COVID, I sometimes still try to figure out who the senior class is. That's the first thought I've got, like who are they. Kids have options nowadays. Do I take my sixth year? Do I come back? But we've got a great group of players, whether they're seniors, whether they're going out or staying for another year. We'll eventually figure all that out.

But as always, it's an emotional day for the kids, their parents, and obviously the coaches. We love these guys. We coach them like our own children.

It's always sad to see a guy move on, period, whoever it is. But it's life. We'd rather them go on that way, that's for sure.

Q. When are you going to have that list?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know, maybe for the radio show for you on Wednesday or whatever day we do that. Nothing is final. It'll start to be final once we get through whatever that is, the couple years, the COVID seniors and all that, whenever this sixth-year stuff is over. Make it a little easier when you know.

Q. You'll have those conversations after the Duke game?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we'll kind of have some conversations today, just figure out who's walking, who's not, who's going out there, who's not.

Q. I remember two years ago when Elijah was coming up in you guys' and being rotated into your defensive line. You talked about how he was lightning quick but he had to work on his fundamentals (indiscernible) be a real weapon for you guys. Now you're lining him up everywhere on the defensive line, has three sacks and he's one of the top talked-about defensive linemen. How have you seen him grow and polish his game to where he's at?

PAT NARDUZZI: Elijah is a worker. That guy, all he does is work; he shuts his mouth and he plays ball. He's always got a smile on his face. He's always happy. He's always trying to get better. Coach Partridge has done a great job. The guy is always smiling and having fun and got a great attitude. He's not like this, some guys are like -- they'll go up and down. You've played with a yo-yo back in the day, too, right? Still do? Me too.

You know, he's a guy that's like this all the time. Some of our best players are guys that are just steady. If every player, every athlete could just learn how to be consistent in what they do every day -- he's just gotten better. The guy is a beast. He's a flat beast. He was a beast Saturday. He caused havoc in the backfield.

Q. When I was watching it back, he beats you with his legs, his burst off the ball, but if someone gets their hands on him, he's learned how to counter that a lot better. How much of that is from the work that he's done with Coach Partridge?

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, he's not been doing it on the side streets. He's getting it from Coach Partridge. Obviously he's ultra talented. He's a great football player. I mean, he's got natural ability, and he's got a great coach.

Q. You said after the game (indiscernible) --

PAT NARDUZZI: I told him before the game.

Q. Well, you said it after the game. Did you have a conversation with the officials?

PAT NARDUZZI: Every week. You can't block them, so just look for a thing called holding. But we don't get many of them. We couldn't get them Saturday, because -- whatever.

Q. Those three senior defensive ends I think had maybe three and a half sacks the first eight games and had seven in the last two. Are they just getting home? Are the plays just being made? Are they just healthy? What do you think has changed in the last couple

weeks?

PAT NARDUZZI: I told them last night, I think some of the change in what we've done and how we've done it is I think some guys, they press. You've heard me say that for four or five weeks. I don't know if that's the reality. I don't know.

But it just seems like John Morgan might have got one of the first sacks, and it looked like he was going to come under, and he's like maybe I should stay up the field and contain this guy, and he gets a sack. But just doing your job and not trying to -- trying to do too much and I've got to get sacks so I can go to the league and do all those things.

Once you're patient and you just play your game and trust the process, trust the defense, things like that happen. I think that's what we've seen the last couple weeks.

Again, with Riley Leonard this week, we're going to -- we'd better contain him because it's another athletic quarterback that, I don't know, rushing yards -- where is he at here, quarterback. He's the leading rusher, okay, go again, 625 yards and 10 TDs rushing, and he's the leading passer. He's thrown over 2,000 yards.

Again, they've got another not only scrambler, he's really good at scrambling, stepping up, bursting out of the pocket and then designated quarterback runs. Probably a dozen a game are going to be him carrying the ball whether it's on his own read keeper, so he's the leading rusher again.

Q. Last week when I asked you about Haba, you talked about how scouts are talking to you about the "almosts" that he gets, the almost strips, the almost sacks and all that. Do you guys evaluate those "almosts" in a certain way or maybe in a similar way, too?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, no doubt about it. The most important thing is you have the ability to get there. Sometimes guys are going to make you miss. That's part of the game. You beat a lineman to get the quarterback and all of a sudden the quarterback is a real good athlete, too, so you've got to win twice. You've got to get there but -- but at least he's getting there. Some guys don't get there. To me that's what the NFL is going to be looking at is does he have the ability to get there. That's the first thing.

They'll continue learning. He missed a couple last year, as well. So it's no different. But sometimes they come, sometimes they don't. You can't worry about it.

Q. Does John have to miss the first half?

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PAT NARDUZZI: I don't think so. Someone else asked me that question. I doubt it. I haven't even thought about it. Shouldn't have to. But maybe I've got to check on that.

Q. Seems like Bub has put together a couple nice games starting the season. What do you think has made him able to hit on some of those plays more often?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, he could have had another one. He had 90 yards, and that first catch he had was exactly like we drew it up. It was perfect.

Actually had it to him again; he didn't come down with the catch. But again, Bub is an unselfish guy. You say a couple weeks in a row; I don't think he had a catch the week before, but he doesn't care. He just keeps going to play.

Sometimes they come to you, sometimes they don't. You don't know what the coverage is going to be when you line up with a certain formation and pass concept. It's got to go where the coverage tells it to go and where the quarterback has got to put it.

But he's an unselfish guy that's had a great scramble in the end zone for a touchdown pass and is just doing his job.

Again, he's trusted the process and good things happen when you do that. He hasn't gotten down, like I didn't get any catches, but he was the same way his first scrimmage here. He didn't catch one ball, and it was kinda like, we've got to get Bub the ball, and he was like, Coach, I'm good, I understand. He gets it. Appreciate him understanding.

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