

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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## Pat Narduzzi

### Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Good afternoon. It's great to have you back. Hope you guys had a great summer. Like I said, it's good to be in August. It's football season.

We welcomed our guys back, even though they've been here all summer, yesterday afternoon. Had meetings all day long. I mean, we had meetings from 1:30 to 8:30 last night, but our guys were ready to play some ball today.

Just overall, physically I think we came into camp healthy as can be. Jerry, you were going to ask the health question, so I figured I'd give it to you early. But we're healthy and probably as fast and as strong as we've been.

I'm not going to go through each strength, but when you look at it even compared to last year and 2021, just our average squat by position and bench and all those numbers, you kind of go whoa. So we've got a strong football team. I think we've got a fast football team. I had a couple of 4.2s during summer. I feel good with where we are right now.

Got number one under our belt today. It's good to see where you are. We have to break from the bad habits in the July work where they're doing it by themselves and we can't coach them. So we're in the business of breaking bad habits now in August.

The kids worked hard today. Again, you get done with practice, and they're like, Coach, that was fast. It's already over? So I think we're just in really good shape and looking forward to coaching these guys the rest of the year.

Questions?

**Q. What are you looking for in the first week of summer camp? Are you just looking to see who's rusty from spring, who's not? What are you looking for as an evaluation?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I feel like they're all rusty. They haven't really played real football since spring ball, since the spring game. Putting on a helmet, putting on their spider pads,



whatever it may be, just playing the game and getting coached hard.

I would say everybody is a little bit rusty. It takes time to get in the groove. Whether it's a quarterback or a D-lineman, it's all the same. It takes time to get exactly what we want. Put it this way. If these guys could coach themselves in July, they wouldn't need us. It would be like that AI stuff that's going on right now. They would just get coached by robots or whatever.

They need us. They're all kind of a little bit rusty, I would say. Hopefully there's not too much rust. Hopefully it's just a little steel wool, we clean it up real quick and polish it up and get ready to go and keep getting better.

**Q. You guys won five games to close your season off. When you have so much time off, does momentum exist?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say there's no momentum from where we ended the season. It's always great to end on a high note, but we're not carrying that in, going -- I don't think they're going, Hey, we're 5-0. Let's go 6-0. I think that's been long gone.

**Q. You had guys going back to last year, with a quarterback that's used to your offensive coordinator, how much more do you start with? What you're working on with the install from last summer to now?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I think the install will be faster. Any time you have a quarterback and coordinator that work together -- I'm watching Christian Veilleux out there today, I'm like whoa. Just his second time going out in that second phase -- he went through spring ball. I thought he looked really, really sharp today as well.

It's like, oh, he looks a little different. I sat him down after practice and said, Hey, you feel a little better right now than you did heading into spring ball? He goes a lot better. Just the terminology and the confidence.

I think for sure that's what Phil had in the spring. Again, that's every position. Everybody should be a little bit more comfortable.

**Q. (Inaudible). What is the biggest difference between**

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**that team when you got here and this team now?**

PAT NARDUZZI: That's a great question. We could put some tape on. Put 2015 there and 2022 there. It's just a lot of different. You look at it, it just looks slower. It looks smaller. It just looks totally -- I mean, totally different. It's night and day.

Maybe it's the camera guy. Maybe the camera guy is older and wasn't so good back in the day and he's a lot better now.

Just the talent level is better than what it was. That's no disrespect to some of the guys we had playing for us because we had some good players. It just seems like top to bottom, you're watching guys out there today, and it's a different -- I feel better this year just looking at these guys running around like, oof, it's a pretty good football team.

You guys tell me. You guys walked out there. You were there back in 2015. When you watched practice then and when you watch it now, there's a little bit of a difference now, I think.

**Q. You guys added some players from the portal after spring ball. How would you say their process and getting integrated has gone so far?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You'd have to tell me who they are. I know Epps was one of them.

**Q. And Jackson Brown.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Jackson Brown. When you don't get spring ball in, they're starting at ground zero really. We've seen both of them do some good things through the summer. We're not out there. We're not watching them in July. You're getting very limited opportunities to even see what they can do.

I know Coach Stac is excited with what they did numbers-wise and the work and effort they put in in the weight room. So that will be -- is it Jackson Brown, Malcolm Epps? Is that it?

**Q. Yes. You mentioned -- you talk about NIL and the transfer portal a lot. Now that it's the trend, you mentioned the salary cap.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Again, when I say salary cap, the NFL has it. I'm not saying the salary cap has to be down here. It could be \$20 million we can spend. I don't care what it is, but get something where we all know that's what we have to be at. I'd like to go in to Heather and say, Hey, everybody else has got 20, so we need \$20 million. That's

it. What are we going to do?

To not know what everybody's doing, you're sitting there guessing. You don't know what it is. It's hard to design. Hey, guess what, we've got 85 scholarships. I want to make sure I've got 85. What if they said, you can have as many scholarships as you want, where does it end? How many do you know you can take or how many you can't take? Everybody who wants 125 scholarships can have 125 scholarships?

That's what I'm talking about. Again, regulation, I want them to make as much money as they can, but we've got to put a lid on it so everybody knows what the limit is. There's limits to everything. Your wife probably limits what you can spend. She probably gives you \$100 a week. There's got to be a limit somewhere.

**Q. What about the -- salary cap is one thing, but are you telling me you're at a disadvantage because there is no regulation right now?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know. I couldn't tell you how much of a disadvantage we're at. There's disadvantages across the country. It wouldn't be just us. But the more fannies you put in the stands, the more alumni that you have. If you've got 17,000 alumnus -- think about if every alumnus gave 100 bucks what you could have. All that stuff matters. There's got to be some limit.

**Q. Has that increased since you've been here with new donations and stuff like that?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Oh, yeah. Talk to Bostick about that. He's in charge of major gifts. Get him up here afterwards.

**Q. How important is team culture whenever -- like keeping in mind what happened at Northwestern this year, how important is it to have strong culture in your locker room?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Just looking at Chicago, it's really strong. I can't tell you they didn't have strong culture there because I've got a ton of respect for Pat Fitzgerald, what he does and who he is as a person.

But the strong culture, doing things the right way and staying on it. We had meetings yesterday. That's no different than we had in 2015, talking about Title IX stuff, hazing, all that stuff. I can pull out a manual from 2015 that we go through with all our guys and it's talked about all the time.

We remind our guys what's happening, whether it's a gambling thing happening out at Iowa State, whatever it is,

I'm always keeping our guys in the know. Our guys are on TikTok, Instagram. They have no clue what happened at Iowa State yesterday with the 26 violations or whatever you want to call it out there.

I'm always informing our guys what's going on so they're aware, like good thing we don't do that. It's just a constant reminder. But having a good culture, you've just got to keep it going because it's day by day.

**Q. Do you feel a little disappointed that you have to tell kids that hazing being bad? These kids are adults now, if you will.**

PAT NARDUZZI: That's our job. I don't feel -- it's our job. It's everything. We've got a bunch -- yesterday I had three or four guys, and I said, who's 17 years old in here? We've got four guys in the back, like holy cow. We've got 17 to 22 years old or sometimes 24 or 25, whatever it is. That's our job. That's what we're here for.

Parents drop their sons off to college, it's like, hey, we're going to take care of your son. We're going to take it to the next step. Different things happen, and you get put into some culture, and if they're doing something wrong, kids think it's the right way to do it and it's not because that's what they did before and that's what they did before.

That's our job. I really do believe that. It's not just coaching football. We've got to make sure they go to class. Do you think it's sad we pay for your school and we still got to make sure you go to class? Jerry, you probably skipped. Billy skipped class probably back in the day.

That's our job. It's everything. It's not just coach football and Xs and Os.

**Q. This time of year, a lot of coaches like it because you have so much time with your players before classes start, whatever. You get that culture in place. Like the Steelers, they've been going to St. Vincent for 50-some years. Have you considered taking these guys somewhere to camp? What are the benefits of doing that?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We've thought about it. There's some teams that have gone away. I've gone -- when we were at Cincinnati, we used to go to Camp Higher Ground. I love it. When you get out there, I'll never forget sitting in a hotel room with the defensive staff like one of them Motel 6 hotel rooms. I'm sitting there -- no disrespect to Motel 6, but just it was like what are we doing here? The cameras are bad. The screen falls down. It's just all that.

Like when you have this facility that we get to work with

every day, I don't think twice about going anywhere. You're just moving your whole operation. The last week before, you're watching the Steelers move all their weight room out there, move everything out there. To move everything out there, you'd want to have facilities already set. You wouldn't want two facilities, if you want one at Johnstown, for example.

Our facilities are so good here. We've got the best food in the world here. We're going to go somewhere else, they're going to feed us what? Our kids would be like, Coach, what are we doing here? We do put them in the hotel down the street. They have school classes until Saturday. Once class is out, they move into the hotel like 16, 17 days.

**Q. It's basically replicating that sort of camp feel but maybe a more comfortable setting? I'm sure Motel 6 might be fun for you but not maybe not picture productive.**

PAT NARDUZZI: No doubt about it. We have the best here. I remember Camp Higher Ground, we didn't have air conditioning. It was camp. We're not looking for day camps. We want to try to win football games.

The health and safety of our kids, how they sleep, how they eat, how they're treated, the cold tubs -- just all the facilities we have and all the recovery stuff, you can't take everything that we have here and the quality we have here and move it somewhere else. It wouldn't be the same.

**Q. Your team is picked to finish tied for 6th in the ACC in the preseason poll, is that something that gives you a chip on your shoulder or something your team is not even aware of?**

PAT NARDUZZI: They're probably not aware of it. I don't know if they follow the ACC. E.J. probably knows better than me.

I hope it puts a chip on their shoulder. We've never been picked to be first. It's the same thing as last year, same thing as the year before, except now it's, I guess, 6th in the total ACC with one division now, I guess, would be like being 3rd in the Coastal. So I guess we're just right where they always put us.

**Q. Is that frustrating? Because you guys have had some success with winning in the conference since you got here, is that correct? Yet it seems to be the same song and dance every August, people maybe not recognizing that you've improved here significantly in the last eight or nine years.**



PAT NARDUZZI: Everybody thinks -- again, without mentioning names, everybody thinks that they're better than you. That's kind of how it is. There's some other really good programs out there. Whether you beat them or not, we're going to be better this year. We were bad last year, but we're going to be better this year. They all have excuses of why they didn't win. We just keep plugging away.

Everybody believes the excuses and ranks them up higher, whatever. We just keep playing football. Our job is to win one game at a time, as you guys know, and just coach our football team and try to be good in August here. Once September 2nd comes around, show people what we got.

**Q. Has the portal changed the way recruiting in the sense that now when a guy commits, he goes elsewhere, there's always that chance that they could come back. Or did you always keep tabs on guys that you were in on and went elsewhere in case they had a change of heart?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I think the portal changes -- it's all about relationships, whether you come in first or second. Sometimes you come in first and you get the guy. Sometimes you come in second. It's how you end that relationship when a kid commits -- I always say that, when a kid commits somewhere else, Congratulations to you. Good luck. You're going to be a great player there, and kind of let it go.

A kid from Pittsburgh, like M.J. Devonshire, when he goes and comes back, it's an easy recruit. Jackson Brown, one we've talked about, I don't think they talked to Jackson Brown as well. He didn't come visit. Like M.J. went away and came back, he didn't visit the second time. I'm coming to Pittsburgh. That's where I should have been to begin with, and he played at Cal.

Those examples with just good relationships that sometimes you get them the second time around. Those are ones that we want because we know who they are as people, and again, we trust our valuation the first time.

**Q. Can that help you on the recruiting trail locally that you can point to guys that are high profile guys locally like, hey, we had guys that went elsewhere and ended up coming back. Is that a beneficial thing for the program?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No question about it. We're going to try to live off that guy, whether it's New Jersey, New York, Ohio, or obviously in the area here. We're going to try to get those guys back if they end up going in the portal.

**Q. Is there a guy on your offensive line right now that you could lean on more as a leader? You guys have had guys like Elijah and Patrick, a number of guys. This is probably the group who's had the least amount of players that you guys have had since the COVID years on a roster.**

PAT NARDUZZI: There's a few of them, but it really starts inside really. I would say David Green and Devin Danielson are two of the guys. And really Ty Bentley stepped up. He's really, really grown up through the years. Those would be the three guys I look at right now. Those are the three guys inside that are really the leaders of that.

Maybe David Green would be the number one guy right now. I know David Green is on our leadership council. Devin, I don't think is, but Devin is a vocal guy, and he's physical. He leads by example on the field. So I would say those two guys for sure are guys that are leading up front.

**Q. Pat, I know you say every position is up for grabs in camp, but what are some big starting position battles that you guys have going on right now? I think you mentioned guard at the kickoff last week. Is there anything on the defensive side of the ball?**

PAT NARDUZZI: They're everywhere, but I'd say if you had to look at some of the hottest contested places, I'd say the guard position for sure. But you know what, Branson Taylor has got -- I'm just watching a Bangally rush off the edge today. We'd better tighten up over there because Bangally kind of wrecked it period today. He's 230 pounds, like someone had better know where No. 11 is. So you look at that guard spot, but like everybody's got to come out and practice and do that.

There's still competition at quarterback. You've got Rodney back there, but C'Bo is a really good football player, Derrick Davis, Daniel Carter. There's a lot of competition in who's getting the reps.

When you're looking at depth charts sometimes, there's not a, hey, these are the top 11 players. They're fluid nowadays. You could almost say there's 16 or 17 starters on offense. You look at Gavin and Karter Johnson, Gavin Bartholomew and Johnson and Malcolm Epps, those three guys there, and Jake Renda, it just keeps getting better. So there's four tight ends that are really athletic now.

Receiving corps, I think we know who our top two are with Konata and Bub, but who's going to be that third receiver, fourth receiver, fifth receiver? We've got four true freshmen that are all talented. We saw Issy in the spring, Lamar Seymore in the spring. All of a sudden, Kenny

Johnson comes into town. Zion had a heck of a day today, I think -- he's a football player -- Fowler-El. So you watch that, and you're going oof.

One of those freshmen is going to play for us, maybe two. I don't know which one it's going to be, but they're going to play this season for us. There's that competition.

D-end there's competition. D-tackle, you've got some older guys in there that we talked about earlier with the leadership part they're doing good. Linebacker, Brandon George is fighting to be that starter at the mike or the boundary back. Solomon DeShields, he's still fighting to hang on. Kyle Louis played spring ball, and he's fighting to be one of those guys that's getting reps.

At safety, probably a major battle, safety spot with Javon and Steph Hall, all of those. There's four or five guys that I don't know, like who's going to play and who's going to start. It's wide open in my opinion. I would say the number one guy right now is Javon McIntyre at safety.

Then the punter situation with Yurk and Junko is a competition there too.

It's really everything. I gave you every position, sorry.

**Q. You mentioned competition at quarterback, is that start or just to play?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say it's competition. It's good. You look at the spring ball, and you think Phil's the guy. But any time you go into the season, you look and think, hey, who's getting better? Whether it's quarterback or corner or safety, our kids sit in the front row and the back row, these kids know who the starters are. It's hard to fool them, yeah, that guy's a starter. Boy, did he have a shitty day today.

They watch videotape too. Sometimes they watch it two or three times. Sometimes I'll only watch it two times. They watch it more than I do. They have more free time, where I was busy putting out fires. They know who they are.

There's competition at every position. There's competition in the NFL. There's competition.

**Q. You're one of the few teams in the Power Five that will schedule -- you guys have two Power Five opponents and Notre Dame on your nonconference schedule. That's not particularly unique. You guys like to schedule judiciously. Is there a reason why you like to schedule Power Five instead of non-Power Five conferences?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I'll play anybody they want to play. It doesn't really matter. Our kids get fired up to play big games, but if you told me we're going to play four powder puffs, I don't care, just give them to me.

One of the big reasons is scheduling. We talk about selling season tickets, who wants to see four FCS teams come in here? Is that what we're paying for? Wait until October or November to get some single game tickets. I think that's one of the things that comes out. You want to put exciting teams in this stadium, in this city to show off what we got and how we match up with all those teams.

In the end, some people have maybe prettier records, but like who's playing real teams and who's not? The people that can measure that, that's great. But they always say at the end of the year, they don't care who you beat. It's how many wins you have. They don't care whether you beat nobody or beat somebody.

**Q. What are your expectations for Dayon Hayes?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Just like they are for everybody else. We expect Dayon to be a really good football player. Keep getting better, be consistent. If you ask Dayon what I tell him every day, consistency. Don't be a great player today and take a day off tomorrow.

To me it's about consistency. I never had to talk to Calijah Kancey about consistency. He just got it every day. So to me, we want him to be consistent. We think he can be really good, but it's every day going to work and putting in the effort.

**Q. I know it's all spring practice and today, but what do you like from each of the quarterbacks so far?**

PAT NARDUZZI: What do I like from the quarterbacks so far?

**Q. Yes.**

PAT NARDUZZI: I guess first thing you love about Phil is Phil has got experience. He's played in big games. He kicked our butt a couple years ago during COVID up there, and he knows the offense the most in that room.

Christian, you love the way he throws it. He's a competitor. I just see him leading out on the field a little bit more. I see him a little bit more comfortable. Again, that's just one day, just listening him talk to the other guys, whether it's receiver or tight end.

Obviously Phil has those leadership skills. Nate Yarnell is a guy that's tough and he's a gamer. He continues to get

better. There's great things to like about everybody and things you need to work on with everybody.

**Q. Is Eli Kosanovich on your coaching staff?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Eli is a student coach right now. Good eyeball there.

You guys know, they changed that rule, and I'm going to give Heather Lyke on the FOC, usually we can bring a hundred heading into camp, and the NCAA did the right thing. We kind of got, I think, emergency legislation to bring in 120. So we got 10 extra players this year.

We worked hard at the ACC level, Dave worked hard, as well as I did, making calls and just trying to figure it all out. But we got it to 120, and Heather is the chair of that committee, and she pushed it. We didn't think it was going to go through, and we got it.

Our kids were so excited because there's 12 months in a year. For 11 months out of the year, we can have 117 to 120 players on our team. Then when August comes around, the most important month of football, we would have to tell -- I would have had to tell 10 guys if they kept the rule the same -- and it did change a week ago, ten days ago -- if it stayed the same, I would have to cut 10 guys. When school starts in September, we can bring back seven to each team. That's bad news.

That's not good for the mental state of these kids. Some of these kids might transfer, we've had others transfer in the past. I'm not coming to camp? I'm going in the portal, and I'm going to transfer. I don't blame them.

It's a major change. What is it, another couple rooms in the hotel? Really what are we talking about? Appreciate all the hard work that Heather put in to get that done for college football. Obviously the Power Five teams wanted it. Some the Group of Fives didn't want it because it is maybe more money for them. That's why sometimes there's Group of Five and Power Five. Then you guys don't bring them in. Let us bring it in.

It was a great rule. Again, it helps with the health and safety of your players because you've got more guys. If a position gets hurt, you got guys down, you got more to put in there. You can practice still. If someone gets hurt, then you start to wear out the other guys behind them and they get hurt too, and then you really end up in a jam.

It's a positive, and it's great for these guys to be in here. Talking about the culture, we sit in here all day yesterday talking about all the rules and the expectations of football, and then you don't have ten guys there. Then when school

starts, you bring in other guys. You don't have time. You can't replicate what we did yesterday. Those are long meetings.

To have everybody in that meeting hearing same exact words, they know what we have as coaches for expectations. That's another huge bonus is having everybody. There's nobody going to be on our team come September that's not already been in that room.

**Q. You talked about the offensive line. What about the two wide? Where do they fit in?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Baer will get work at both left guard and left tackle. Jacoby will get work at both left guard and left tackle and see how it shakes down. We're going to find the best people there. What better time to find out is the defense, all the different things we do, we'll find out before the season who's the best five.

**Q. How do you envision a ground game? Do you want Rodney to be your lead guy? Do you want to spread that around?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I want to find out during fall camp and find out where they are. We know Rodney's a good player. I think C'Bo is a good player too. We're going to find out. We've got a two-headed monster back there, that's great too.

Again, we had that last year really with Issy and Rodney. Then when Rodney got hurt, kind of changed a little bit. So we'll see.

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