

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: It's game time. I think it's fun to get into game week. I think our guys are excited about playing somebody else, game planning, really working situations. I think that's part of the game.

I think they're sick of hitting each other. I think it's a great opportunity to find out where we are.

I say this all the time, we can feel good as we stand out there, and you had a good day yesterday, and this guy looked good, that guy looked good, but it all comes down to what you do on Saturdays and nobody cares what you did the last two years. 20 wins are never going to get you a win this year.

Our goal is to go out and look sharp on Saturday and beat Wofford. That's a good football team. It's got 14 returning starters, seven on defense and five on offense and two specialists they got back.

Again, the head coach, Shawn Watson, is a great friend of mine, goes way back. Obviously he worked here for a couple years, and we still stay in touch. Just a super coach and has been a head coach before.

You think about it, they didn't win a game before he took over, and again, I've got a lot of respect for the head coach prior to that, but just a little bit of a change with the offensive coordinator and someone else calling it and Shawn taking over as a head coach. They were 3-3 as the interim head coach, and that's how he got the job.

Officially I'll congratulate him in the media. Happy for him and his wife. It's a great opportunity for him to take over that program and have something great there.

Questions?

Q. Is this the first time you've ever coached against someone who worked under you and is now a head coach?

PAT NARDUZZI: Worked under me?



Q. Worked for you.

PAT NARDUZZI: I've only been a head coach going on eight years, so I would say yes.

Q. What are your thoughts on that dynamic? Is it a little weird for you? Are you excited for it?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think it's going to be different playing against somebody you know, whether they worked under you or worked with you. I don't know if that matters. You look at Scott Shafer, the head coach at Syracuse for a long time, I've known him for a long time, as well. I don't care -- I didn't work for Scott but we worked together.

Again, I don't look at it as worked for, worked underneath, who's the boss, who's not the boss. It's about people, and to me I treat them all the same. It doesn't matter.

I've played against guys that I've worked with in the past, whether it be as an assistant or as a head coach.

You never want to see anybody lose, especially your friends, and you never want to get beat by your friends, so it's always tough that way because they're friends of yours and you want to see them have success every game except the one that they have to play you.

Q. Did (indiscernible) help you with the job at Miami?

PAT NARDUZZI: There's no question about it. No doubt about it. I helped myself -- I think I worked hard enough.

I think you get what you deserve in this business, and really all businesses. But started off as a defensive GA working with linebackers, and Tim Carras and Terry Hoepfner on defense and Jack Glowik. Then my second year Randy Walker moved me over to offense, so I was working with Sherman Smith, who was a running back coach, so I was coaching running backs. Sherman Smith is unbelievable, played for Seattle Seahawks and long time in the NFL and coached with the Seahawks before he retired.

Then the third year came around and I was getting ready to leave to go to Vanderbilt with Jerry DiNardo, and they hired me as a receiver coach. He certainly helped me -- I don't



know what the word was on the side, and then he not only helped me get it but he did more than that, I think, and coached me up because I wasn't a receiver coach.

I'll never forget we went into Millett Hall, which is a basketball arena at night, when we got all the work done at night, and he coached me up on releases and routes and all things I needed to know as a coach.

I'll never forget that, and I attribute a lot of things I do just teaching-wise to what he was able to teach me back in the day, and he was a heck of a recruiter, too. Shawn Watson is a great recruiter, so I learned a lot of recruiting stuff from Shawn Watson.

Q. When you watch the tape from Wofford when he took over as head coach last season, do you see a lot of similarities from his offense here at Pitt?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, there's all the zone plays and there's definitely the Shawn Watson influence on their offense with all the 12 personnel and all the outside zone, inside zone, the wide zone as he'll call it, so you certainly see all the same stuff.

You don't see as much jet sweep stuff, and then I think an influence from their offensive coordinator now who at least is calling the plays, we assume, but Coach Watson could certainly be calling them, as well, but -- because he's a receiver coach, there's a lot more passing, so expect some shots, which would be good. We need to see those and find out where our secondary is.

Q. What about him knowing your defense, being in this building for two years, scrimmaging against him? Is that something you have to take into consideration, that he probably knows what you like to do?

PAT NARDUZZI: He knows what we like to do, but you've still got to stop it. So does Coach Cignetti, so does anybody that's played against us for eight seasons knows. I think we're simple enough on defense that people know what we do. It's a matter of making plays.

Again, we've got to make plays on defense. They've got to make plays, too. Because we're so simple, we could change it all up against them, and obviously we've got wrinkles from what we did a year ago compared to what we're doing now, but everybody has got wrinkles and changes they've made through the off-season, things that were good for you, things that weren't good for you, things we need to add to the package, but we've done that forever.

But we're simple enough that we know what we're doing so

we can play fast, and that's always been my philosophy is don't do so much where you can junk it up and play slow. I don't think you guys would like what that would look like. We're going to know what we're doing. That's what we do.

Q. As recently as last week you mentioned how Christian and Nate were in a decent competition for QB2 on your roster. On the depth chart you've got Christian listed right behind Phil. What did Christian do to earn that spot?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think we maybe haven't talked for a week, but Christian was right there with Nate, and I think just at the end he -- but that doesn't mean Nate can't win a football game for us. As we know, he's already done it. He's a good football player, too. It just seemed like Christian got just a little bit more comfortable and didn't make as many little mistakes as Nate did.

That's kind of where it is, but that could change next week. You go out and have a -- all three of those quarterbacks are working with our offense. Nate won't be on scout team like he was last year, so he'll be right up there competing.

Q. What did Nate Temple do to earn the starting job?

PAT NARDUZZI: He stayed healthy. I give him a lot of credit now. I didn't know if he could make it through a camp, a spring ball and stay healthy, but he did. We're excited he did.

That's the first win of the year is Nate Temple stayed healthy. We know Nate is a good football player, again, when he's on the team, so no one has really seen Nate Temple. We changed his number from 16 to 6 because he stayed healthy and took that 1 off his Jersey, and we're looking forward to seeing Nate Temple make plays. We're going to find out.

Q. The same question about Daejon; what did you see that made you think he'd be better in that starting job?

PAT NARDUZZI: Daejon has been pretty consistent through camp, and those young guys are right on his tail. I can tell you that. They're nipping at his butt right now, but he's been consistent. He's really smart football-wise, for a guy that came in, and he learned the offense quickly, so I think we'll know he's going to do the right thing. That's the first thing. You can have some guy that can run real fast, but he's done the right thing. He knows what to do. He's shown it out on the field.

Again, we'll find out when game day hits. That's what I'm excited about is finding out what we have because you don't know playing against each other. We're going to find

out with new competition and find out how mature we are and where we are overall.

Q. What did Jason Collier show in camp to have him listed as a starter with Jacoby?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, let me look at that. He makes this stuff up, so I don't know. One thing I'll say about Jacoby and I meant to tell you maybe in my opening statement is Ryan Jacoby is out for the year, so that's where that "or" is at right now. Ryan got hurt mid-camp, I guess, not in a live situation, not in a thud situation, in an individual situation. So Ryan unfortunately is out. We're going to miss him. Let me tell you he was having a heck of a fall. Compared to spring ball, he had footwork issues, wasn't stepping with the right foot fast enough to get where we wanted to be, but that was all gone.

That's a big departure in my opinion because he was playing at a high level. But we're going to get him healthy and get him back. But we're excited about where he'll be in the future because of what he's learned from spring ball to now.

But unfortunately, we won't have him with us.

Q. Talk about what Deandre did in camp to get himself in the top of the defensive tackle position with three guys that have started games for you.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, there's a constant battle. All four of those guys are starters in my opinion and that's why this depth chart is -- you guys talk about the "ors" and this. You've got a bunch of "ors" because you really can't say they're not starters, some of these guys.

The same thing at the corner position; it's A.J., M.J. and Quis. There's three starters without a question.

It's which one is going to start this week, which one is going to start next week based on how they practice and how we feel the match-ups are. But your question was about O, and Deandre Jules we took his 9 off as well, because he had a great camp. He's big, he's physical. That's a guy that just keeps getting better.

If he has a great year, I could see that guy playing in the NFL. He's big, he's physical, he's got a good pass rush. He's playing at a high level right now.

It's going to be a big year for him to show the world really what he's got inside, but he's just a big man. He looks like you're supposed to look.

Q. How hard is it to prepare for a team when you don't

know who their starting quarterback will be?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's hard. You don't know what he's going to be. You look at last year's guy, and their last year's guy, kid from Pickerington in Ohio was really good, and I'm sure they've got another really good guy right behind him. You just don't know.

He played actually -- the guy that we suspect that's on their depth chart that we kind of anticipated would be starting coming into this game, he played a little bit in the spring season of COVID, I believe, and so we've got very little tape on him, but we've got tape.

But that's two years ago. He's not the same guy, and he played behind a really good player last year.

I know Shawn Watson is a quarterback whisperer, so he'll find a way to get that guy to be productive. He's the quarterback coach, I'm assuming, still, because of the staff -- I think they still at that level have six assistant coaches. I know they've got quality controls, probably coaching stuff, I'm sure he has a top assistant quarterback coach, but he's probably the guy that's in that room with the quarterbacks daily in my opinion.

Q. With Jacoby, is there a current plan to seek a medical redshirt so he can come back next year or has he talked with you about that?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we'll take care of that when his eligibility is over. You really don't ask for that now, to get a sixth year, seventh year, eighth year, I don't know. But certainly if something he wants to go after, we'll certainly take care of that and request that.

Q. A couple of weeks ago you talked about consistency being built throughout training camp. Were they able to show that maybe specifically from Phil to or were they able to show that in these final two weeks of training camp to lead up to this week?

PAT NARDUZZI: You mean our team or?

Q. I know you mentioned the team, but also there was a specific part in there about Phil, how he was completing a high percentage of his passes and really developing along.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we ended up being consistent for sure. I mean, I think what you saw -- again, there's those consistent guys and inconsistent guys and you try to change and get more consistent than you do inconsistent.

The guys that were still inconsistent, they still were



inconsistent probably. Maybe we took three or four guys that were inconsistent and put them to that next level, like hey, they've got it. But we've just got to put them in position to be successful.

Again, practicing is different than playing a game. Sometimes you see more out of a guy in a game than you do in practice and you're like, what are you doing. I thought near the end they got sick of playing against each other to be honest with you this last week, so I think we need to -- it was time for a change. Again, Saturday will be our change.

Q. Last season Bangally started out at star with you guys but this year you have him at money and Solomon at star. Can you talk about the reasoning behind that and what they both showed?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, no real reasoning. They're both good players, and Bangally has played a lot out there at that position, too, so they're interchangeable based on who we're playing.

To me there's no difference. One guy plays in space, one guy doesn't. Bangally has had a lot of reps out there.

There's really -- I couldn't give you a great reason except for they're both good athletes and maybe Bangally is probably physically suited -- probably the best reason when I say that, Bangally is physically suited to do both but maybe a more physical guy in the box, where I would say DeShields is probably the less physical. If I had to say which one is more physical, I would say Bangally, and Bangally is a heck of a blitzer and we like to blitz. So we're able to blitz him and not DeShields. DeShields has gotten to become a good blitzer, as well, and we'll blitz him from the field, as well.

But I would probably say just the physicality and the extra year playing, I think Bangally is like 230. I don't know what DeShields weighs. What's DeShields weigh on the sheet? Looks like it says 225, so Bangally is a little bit bigger, I guess.

Q. What did the two starting safeties do to earn those shots, Javon and PJ?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think I told you earlier Javon has had a great spring and he had a good fall, as well. If PJ had a great -- I challenged him back after spring ball about being a better communicator and doing all the little things and PJ actually had a really good fall camp.

Again, but we've got guys behind that. We're going to find out who our starting safeties are after the first couple

games I think and kind of have an idea of who's going to get it done when the fire is burning.

Q. Last year you opened with West Virginia, so we didn't really ask you about it then, but in previous years we've always asked you about the season openers and your approach. Has your approach evolved over eight years, nine years to how you go into these games and how you view them, either to kind of get rolling --

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. I think game 1 is game 1 regardless of who you're playing. Obviously I think the kids get more cranked up if they were playing Alabama or Georgia in the opener as opposed to Wofford, but that's my job is to get their tails ready to go, which I will.

So opening up with West Virginia, I think there was a lot of motivation and a lot of juice for that game, so I kind of prefer those, but it's nice to have a game that you can make a couple mistakes in and hope you've still got a chance to win the football game. If you make too many, you get beat either way.

Q. I asked earlier and it kind of turned into you announcing the Jacoby news, but what did you like about Collier?

PAT NARDUZZI: Again, those two were battling it out, and Jason was having a good camp, as well. But Jason has been here for a long time. He knows the system. He's smart. He's played right guard. He's played left guard.

He just naturally fit into that spot. Again, he's been playing guard for a long time.

We always talk about our older guys playing their best football right now, and Jason is playing his best football right now.

He's going to have the opportunity. We've got a lot of faith in what he's doing, and it's going to be fun to watch Jason Collier go play, a former recruited tight end out of high school, big athlete, got bigger than I thought he would be. He's about 240 pounds, I think. I took his dessert away the other day and said, slow down. Took his brownie away when he was playing corn hole. He was mad.

Q. How would you describe the personality of this group?

PAT NARDUZZI: Of the whole group? The personality. I think we'll find out. We've got a great group of guys. We've got character guys in here. I don't want to say polite but we'll find out on game day.

To me you find out what the leadership is in this room. We're going to find out they really take ownership on game days and how bad they want to win.

But we've got great guys. The personality, again, pleasing. They're pleasers, I think. I think our football team is pleasers. They're going to do what you would not do, and we're going to find out how pleasing they are on September 2.

Q. (Indiscernible) did he see more of his time one side or another this summer?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'd say about 50/50.

Q. Why is he at left tackle?

PAT NARDUZZI: Why is he left tackle? Because he's your best tackle. I would think you always want to put your best tackle at left tackle, right. If we had a left-handed quarterback, maybe he would be at right tackle, but you want to protect the back of your quarterback, and he's our best pass protector. But we've got confidence in Branson Taylor, as well.

Q. My question was also about Matt. He's always done what he needed to do. What led to him being named captain, and what kind of honor --

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know, you'd have to ask the players that because they voted on him. I didn't vote. None of our coaches had a vote on that. But unanimously they voted in those three guys.

But I think, number one, the guy that gets voted captain is a guy that's proved it on the field that he can play, okay, but I think he's a guy that's on the field and off the field the same guy. There's not too much talk. He's going to lead with his actions.

But the words that do come out of his mouth are meaningful, and I think that's probably an important thing about a leader. Matt is going to lead when he needs to. If something is wrong, he's going to step up and say something in the huddle. I know that.

Again, I'll say this: Phil Jurkovec is probably the leader of our offense. Anytime you've got your quarterback, he is the leader, okay, and I think there's -- that's a fact, so Phil really is the leader of the offense, and again, Matt Goncalves is the captain of the offense, but everything is going to go with Phil, and he will be the biggest leader on offense in my opinion. He's just not a captain.

Q. What are your thoughts on college football's week 0?

PAT NARDUZZI: I was wishing this weekend I was playing. I think it's good. It splits it up, gives more TV game for the industry and all that, so I think it's good.

Now again, I think this: Week 0 and more games, and I think with the playoffs, there will be more week 0s.

The positive is there's football on TV. That's the positive. The negative is those guys had to come into camp a week earlier, so you're moving into July, and again, we're beating up our kids, so there's just another week of football, another week for the coaches, another week for the players, and the coaches are fine because it's just the mental part of it. We don't physically run ourselves to death.

But these kids, it's just another week on their legs. It's another week during the season to get hurt. You might have more injuries near the end of the year if you're starting that early, so that's the negative of week 0. I know there's a lot of head coaches out there that want to play week 0 because the kids got to come into camp, which means it's another week of academics, so now we're in camp and now we have two weeks of school as opposed to this year we had one week of school when camp started.

We're back into playing football when we've got school, and that's not good, either, for the kids if we truly think they're student-athletes.

Q. Did you get done everything you wanted to get done this summer and did you see everything you wanted to see this summer?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, if you said, hey, you've got another week of camp, what else do you want to see, I'm ready to play. I think our kids are ready to play. I don't think there's anything else if we strung this week of camp out a little bit longer to see, hey -- they've had enough. They're ready to play somebody else. They're ready to game plan and perfect the game plan towards the game.

I think they're ready. There's nothing else, so I've seen everything I can see.

Q. How much versatility has M.J. shown in your secondary, and how much does having Marquis and A.J. back help him?

PAT NARDUZZI: That certainly helps him. That's a strength of our defense out there, at least in the secondaries, those three corners that are all three starters.

The versatility of M.J., I don't know if -- he's versatile. He's a playmaker. I know if I was an offensive coordinator I'd probably not throw it his way. Those other guys are going to get more targets I'd imagine, because he just goes and gets the ball.

I mean, like you can have a perfect pass, this guy somehow comes up with it. Our quarterbacks found that out this spring.

I would imagine the other guys are going to get more targets. We'll find out as we go through it. But he's really mastered his game. The thing about M.J. is he's a competitor. He's versatile. Again, those other guys, it just gives you depth.

Again, all three of them are big-time corners, and all three of them could play in the NFL in my opinion. So they're all good.

Again, with I guess A.J. being right in the middle, I'd say Quis is more of a nifty player. He loves -- you run a bubble to his side or something, he's going to make a play. He's physical. For a smaller guy, he is pound for pound one of the toughest guys on our football team. A.J. is kind of in between those two guys, so we've got a good blend of players there.

Q. How much confidence does it give you that you have the three returning corners there to help in the secondary to break in those two safeties that have never really started before, other than --

PAT NARDUZZI: It helps. You'll see our corners and tight ends making calls to them. Usually our safeties are the quarterbacks of the DBs and they're making those calls. But if you're watching, you'll see the corners now are making calls to the safeties saying hey, let's play this. So they'll make their little checks there. So you'll see a little bit more of that because they're comfortable doing it, and just it takes the pressure off the safeties.

Q. You had another walk-on earn a scholarship, it was announced this weekend. How nice is it for you to be able to give all three of those guys something that you feel they earned?

PAT NARDUZZI: Those are three guys that we had targeted going in thinking those were going to be the guys, but they had to go out and earn it, and all three of them did what we expected them to do. Junko had a great fall camp, and then the last one -- and obviously Lapi, but the last one there, Jake, there was no order of which one was the first one. It just worked out that way of when we wanted to do it and how we wanted to do it.

But Jake had a great spring and he had another good fall. I think maybe at times he pressed it a little bit, so I think this gave him a little bit of a relief that okay, I got what I've been working for for a long time and now I can go play football, and I think that will make him play even better.

Q. Is Baer going to get much action at guard?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's going to get action at guard, at tackle.

Q. More now that Jacoby is out?

PAT NARDUZZI: No question. There's no doubt about it.

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