

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Head Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

North Carolina 41, Pitt 24

PAT NARDUZZI: All right. Tough ball game. Again versus a really good football team. Drake Maye is a football player. Regardless of what coverage we put at him, the guy seemed to make a lot of plays.

Obviously Phil Jurkovec left at the end of the first half with an injury, and that hurt us. I thought Phil really played well in the first half and made a lot of plays. Took that opening drive down the field for a touchdown, an eight-minute drive.

Gavin Bartholomew played well. Johnson, you saw what type of big plays he could make on a kickoff return. Blocked punt in the second half by Biles. That's his second of the year. True freshman from Columbus, Ohio. He's got a knack. He almost got another one it looked like out there.

But we had our opportunities. We had our opportunities in the second half. My observation from the sideline is our kids played hard, never quit. You got three turnovers in the second half. Three turnovers in the second half with Drake Maye at quarterback, you know, you're going to have problems. Two interceptions, a fumble.

The one that really hurt after the blocked punt, we got the ball at the plus 20. Again, you are talking about a 17-point game. We had our opportunities in the second half and didn't convert. Just a lot of things happened.

Penalties, we're lopsided today. Started with the strip sack that I thought was a sack -- or sack strip, and they get the ball. That was a big play for our defense that didn't pan out that way.

Our punt team gave up two returns, and from the sideline we can't put the ball in the middle of the field and let the guy -- I don't know what they did with our gunners. We'll see it, but we put the ball in the middle of the field, and



Junko has been great all year at putting it outside the hashes, but we put it in the middle of the field. So we've got to clean that up this week.

Gave a punt return for a touchdown. I mean, 17 points, and the opportunities -- we had opportunities, again, against a really good football team. Again, the second half hurt us with three turnovers.

So, questions.

Q. Pat, is Phil in the protocol, or do you know the extent of that?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's not in protocol.

Q. Pat, what does it say about Phil who -- he has been through a lot these last couple of weeks? What does it say about him to come out here and play like he did in the first half today?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I wish he would have got four quarters. I wish he would have got four quarters.

He didn't turn it over at all in the first half. Made good decisions, threw one away on their sideline the one time when he didn't have time.

Again, protection wasn't great, as you guys know. The fourth different offensive line in there in four games. We had two starters out this week, and we'll looking to see. But we gave up two sacks. We got five sacks on them.

So did we protect the quarterback? Not as well as we want to. He took some hits. Phil did a good job running it. We thought we had one had in the second half, a deep ball, but Christian didn't have a chance and got whacked quickly, too quickly, on a protection that we had extra guys and got beat inside with chip protection.

When you get chip protection, we're chipping the end, and then you should never ever get beat inside because you know you've got chip help outside. Protection-wise, we did the best to protect our quarterbacks all day knowing what we were lining up with as far as personnel goes.

Q. Pat, Phil completed his first set of throws, but for pretty short yardage. Was there a concerted effort to



get him some of the underneath -- to get his feet underneath him? What was that plan early on for him to kind of get established there?

PAT NARDUZZI: There were completed passes. It didn't matter what was called. We tried to get the ball to what we thought was open, and whether you want to call it easy passes, there's no easy passes out there.

You can even see in the second half with some short throws that are tipped and the ball is going around and you are, like, oh, holding your breath that it's not another interception. You know, it was just part of the game plan.

Q. You tried some different things in the secondary. Tried to maybe confuse or just give different --

PAT NARDUZZI: We tried a bunch of different stuff back there, but I have never seen so many passes caught on the sideline. It's great execution by them.

We have guys in coverage. The only big one we gave up was they ran a spin route on us. Again, I'll look at really what exactly happened. I think they lined up in triple bunch. I think we gave up a 52-yarder in the second half in the first series, I believe, which hurt.

But Drake Maye is a good quarterback, guys. I don't know how many throws he missed, but we put pressure on him. He did beat us with his feet sometimes down inside the red zone where we had it covered and then all of a sudden he takes off running.

It's hard when they are blocking with five or six guys, and you got four-man rush or whatever it is, five-man rush, and he slips out and gains yards. Then there was some good coverage sacks. I can tell you that.

Q. With more shuffling on the offensive line, do you feel like the protection was improved tonight from what you had last week and maybe the week before?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes and no. Some plays, but we had our chances. We've got to do a better job protecting. Again, I have got faith in all those guys in there.

Like I told them, it doesn't matter. I told them last week, you know, during the week, remember coming in here against a Virginia Tech team with about 21 guys down. I didn't know. I told Heather, I don't know if we could play the game.

We had backups across the board, and I think our guys got excited about that, too. It doesn't matter who is out there. We still had a chance to win with a makeshift offensive line,

and we had a chance, and we just didn't make enough plays in the second half and really gave it to them.

Q. You guys had 11 penalties for 83 yards. What do you have to do to minimize those mistakes?

PAT NARDUZZI: We had a taunting penalty after a big hit by Donovan McMillon, but from my observation there were some calls that were made that I didn't really care for. So I see it going both ways, but Pitt got called today, so I guess it's on us.

Q. What do you guys have to do better against Drake Maye on the four of five touchdowns to start the game? Your offense had a hot start. I know he limits how much you can do, but when you look at what you guys were able to do in the first half, what do you have to do better?

PAT NARDUZZI: Cover him better. Get pressure. I don't know what to tell you. He is a really good player.

What did we give up? 273 -- 373 yards. That's clearly probably 100 yards underneath their average. He made enough completions and made some plays.

I mean, their one touchdown in the second half, he carries it. I think Nate Temple is on him, and he throws a touchdown pass. The only problem is there's a tight end blocking about 12 yards down the field that should be called. He is blocking. It was a run.

But the penalties are on us and not on them, so I don't know what else to tell you. He is a good football player. I don't know what -- give him a lot of credit. He's a really good football player.

Q. You mentioned the punt returns they had, including the touchdown. Both of those came on punts that were at least 50 yards. Just in addition to leaving it more maybe in the middle of the field, was there any other issues there maybe with hang time, anything you saw in real-time?

PAT NARDUZZI: I didn't get the hang time on it. I was kind of mad I didn't get it. I was looking for it. We were busy trying to fix something else and didn't get it.

The hang time looked good. I don't know if we outkicked our coverage, but our gunners got wired up. I know that and got blocked to the field. He took it.

From the field the punt -- it was more location as opposed to hang time, I don't think, but I don't have a stopwatch on me. I apologize.

I'm going to throw this out here. Just the last thing. I thought the Panther Pitt, that was an electric atmosphere. Our fans did an unbelievable job again.

I can't tell you how much we appreciate all the fans out there, and that Panther Pitt was loud. They're unbelievable. They do a great job. I wish we would have got this win. I feel bad for them, but we will be back.

There's no quit in that locker room. Let me just tell you. They're upset. We'll fix stuff, and we're going to come back. I told them and I think I told maybe the media on Thursday that the team -- maybe it was the radio show. The two teams that will be in the championship game at the end of the year will have one loss, guaranteed. There's too much parity in this conference, and there's going to be two teams with one loss I think in the division or in the conference.

So everything we'll do is still ahead of us. That's a good football team, and we'll be back and go down to Virginia Tech and get it done. Thank you.

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