

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Closing chapter last night on that ball game. Again, North Carolina is a good football team. You go back and watch it. Good team. We played just average football. There's a lot of positives to take from the game.

I think we were better than the week before and our guys up front played better. They took coaching last week. Again, it's not going to be a snap your fingers and get perfect one day, but with the young guys we had inside and Terrence Moore is holding and snapping the ball every play, I was really happy with that inside part of our offensive line.

Terrence Moore, Jason Collier and Blake Zubovic played really good, especially first time being together a bunch and Terrence making all the calls up front for the offensive line.

That was a real positive to see.

Again, like I said, those two drives, your quarterback gets hurt, you've got to look at our second-team quarterback in Christian right now, and again, after further review, again, you look at the quarterback play, and again, the three turnovers there, it's not all on him.

Again, I won't get into details, but if you go back and watch the tape, the one ball he throws, the interception in the end zone, again, as fast as Kenny ran that kickoff return he wasn't running that route. He slowed down, didn't see the ball, didn't think he was going to get it, and the DB is right with him. If Kenny with his speed bursts up and get that, it's a touchdown for us instead of a touchdown for them.

That's the fine line that it is, and go back and watch that -- just go back and watch that one play, and you'll be like, ooh, coach is right. But you don't see that on the field, so you've got to go back and look.

Again, Christian is getting hit in the mouth immediately. Did a heck of a job getting it off, and again, the protection on that play was not good at all. I'm not sure if the protection was really good if they'd have hit him anyway if



we slowed down the route.

Little things like that, and again, freshmen are going to do that, seniors are going to do that sometimes. But again, a lot of good stuff there.

Then defensively, we held them to more yards than anybody has this year. South Carolina was the next best, but 63 yards away from where we were. There was a lot of good stuff. We stopped the run, and really when you look at the passing yards, their total offense didn't equal what they passed against us a year ago, and again, that quarterback, you go back and look at it, like he's a really good football player.

We brought some of our favorite pressures that we could have got home, but he is so fast with getting the ball out of his hands. It's like -- there's some quarterbacks that are like really slow getting it out of their hand and they freeze and don't know what to do. This dude don't freeze; this guy can make a shot, and he's going to make a heck of an NFL quarterback just because he can see it.

He must have -- I don't know what his eyes are like or how much tape that guy watches, but he's pretty good there.

As far as injuries, I'll start off, I only talk about injuries when it's guys that are out for the season, so unfortunately we've got one guy that's out for the year. Disappointing. Obviously disappointed for our football team, but more importantly disappointed for him, but captain Matt Goncalves will be out for the year.

I'm sad for him, sad for his family. They'll be at every game anyway because they're so blue and gold and let's go Pitt and all that. It's nothing you expect. He's in such good shape and such a tough dude and captain again. It's a hit to our offense.

I'll put that out there, and again, that's really the only one that we have to talk about, at least I'm going to talk about.

Then as far as Virginia Tech, Coach Pry going into his second year down there still trying to get things going, and to me they put up more yards last year against us than North Carolina did last weekend, so you've got to get a feel for what you're dealing with. They put up over 400 yards against us, so you're talking about a very capable football



team, and we've got to go play down in that atmosphere.

I think offensively we're facing the same kind of offense you do almost every week. These spreads with the -- it's all the same formations and plays, so there's a lot of carryover for our defense. I'm sure we'll see different tweaks that we're going to see.

Then defensively, again, it's another four-down front. Structure is a little bit different in the back end, but at least for our offensive line just to go out there and play against another four-down, again, they've got a little bit of odd stuff, as well, just like everybody in the country does, but they major in a four-down, so at least gives our young offensive line a little chance there to have a little bit of familiarity.

With that, I'll open it up for questions.

Q. I think I heard you say five minutes ago "Christian right now." Does that mean Christian is starting Saturday?

PAT NARDUZZI: Don't worry about my words. I have no idea. But I don't know why I said right now. It's probably your ears. Maybe I didn't say that. I don't know, I couldn't tell you.

Q. Will Christian and Phil receive their same reps this week in practice?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know.

Q. Do you think Christian did a good job coming in in the second half?

PAT NARDUZZI: Did he do a good job? I think he was good. Like I said, it's the guys around you. Again, we got three turnovers, and anytime you see that you're going to say no. We had two the week before, and it's not good.

Whatever the reason is, we've got to get it fixed.

But again, if Phil was our starting quarterback - let's start there - then we'll see where we are.

Q. You mentioned the makeshift offensive line. How much time did they have to practice to get ready?

PAT NARDUZZI: Wednesday and Thursday. Wednesday and Thursday. Jake Kradel practiced last Tuesday until we noticed there was an issue at the end of practice where he was like, I don't feel good, and I think it was play 53. He wanted to be there for the team, a team guy.

Our guys want to go play, and sometimes we've got to be

smart, too.

Q. What did you see from Phil during practice last week that allowed him to come out and have the start to the game that he had?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I thought it was my pass rush skills that you guys talked on Thursday. It might have been my pass rush skills at the quarterback.

I didn't see anything different, okay. I didn't see anything different. He does the same thing. He acts the same way. Did we do a couple different drills, like that pass rush and bring some DBs over? Again, mentally, we'll have you guys all go run at him this week; would that help? Maybe it'll be even better if you guys chase after him on the field, but I don't think that had anything to do with it. He carries himself and he prepares the same way every week.

It's just getting in a rhythm of playing and knowing your guys and feeling comfortable. I don't know. But again, it's everybody around him.

The protection has gotten a little bit better. Let's start there. Give up five sacks, and he's gotten hit -- Cincinnati he got hit 21 times or something like that, and 25 out of 44 pass protections were not good. Then you go into West Virginia, it was a little bit better; we make some bad decisions. Then last week the protection was better.

I think when guys around you play really good or play good, it makes you play good. When guys around you don't play good, it trickles right back to that poor guy standing behind the center.

Q. The first drive that you guys scored on, do you think you can replicate and build upon to be a more consistent part of your offense?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think we can. I think that's kind of what you try to do. You look at where we were driving down the field against West Virginia and we get stuck, and all of a sudden now this week, that just tells you the attitude of our football team. They're trying to get better. They're sitting in here last time, they've got a great attitude. Our guys are ready to move on.

It's the same thing; they see those two drives and go, let's do that all the time, and why can't we be more consistent. Again, it's attention to detail. It's just you start to fade away and you start to try to make a play.

Just got to be more detailed. Again, it's some young guys making mistakes, and we've got to get it fixed up, and we will.

Q. You guys have gone about fixing those details and you have some banged up players in some key spots, at quarterback, running back, offensive line. How much of an extra challenge is that to kind of deal with those injuries and find your chemistry?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's an extra challenge. I'll go back to -- as soon as you fix that, something else breaks. That's what you do. Like our punt team was so good, and you're feeling good, and all of a sudden that breakdown right there, that bothered me bad. It's like, God, we should have worked more coverage. Our coverage was crappy.

Now what's the focus this week? You worry about this, worry about that. We've got to get that coverage. We've got to spread the field. We did just a bad job with our gunners. They did some stuff that we hadn't seen. They doubled the gunners up, which they've never done. Their whole punt block team was totally different than what it was going into the game, and we didn't do a good job adjusting. Our guys didn't do a good job of fanning the field, and they got it. That won't happen again. We'll fix that this week.

But as soon as you fix something, where do you spend your time? You've got to spread it out, and you've got a 20-hour rule, so you've got 20 hours a week that you can work with them, and obviously you're going to be out on the field no more than six hours a day. Then they go to class. They're not in the league where they sit in a meeting room and have their own desk.

Q. How did Ryan Baer grade out?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know what his grade was, but I think -- and I may be wrong here, guys. I think even on the play where Christian gets whacked on the one play that we got outside help, and it's a habit to kick slide, but he kicked slid from where we got beat inside too quickly, and again, that's a young guy's mistake. It's like that motor memory of always kicking sliding, like you're blocking like you don't have help all the time, but when you have help there, that should never happen.

We gave those tackles some extra help at times during the day, and we didn't take advantage of it. There was a couple times we did. But it was just a -- just something we've got to do again and again and again and rep and rep, and there's just not enough time to get maybe that motor memory that you want at whatever position that is.

I think he played solid in the run game. We had some great blocking up front in the run game, but we've got to get better in the pass protection, as well.

Q. Is he a guy from day one that you expected to make a jump?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think so. He made a good jump from playing the time he did against West Virginia down there. That was a good start. I'm glad he didn't just get his fresh start this -- having to come in in relief because we got a chance to at least practice him for three days.

But I think Ryan Baer is only going to get better, and Branson Taylor same thing.

Q. Going into Saturday, is Christian definitely the guy, or would there be any consideration given to Nate Yarnell?

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say right now Christian would be the guy if that's the case, and Nate will be ready to roll. There's a lot of faith in Nate Yarnell; I can tell you that. I love Nate Yarnell. He's a competitor. He's a leader. But you kind of -- you've got to give Christian his chance to get it done, period. I've got a lot of faith in him, as well.

I've got faith in everybody in this room, guys. It's a next-man-up mentality, period, whether it's the O-line or quarterback. You can't lose faith. You really can't.

Q. As a defensive coach, how much of a disadvantage is it when you don't know the other team's starting quarterback?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't think it really matters when you watch what we do. All three of our quarterbacks are capable of zone read keeps and doing all that stuff we're going to do as far as running the ball.

It would be different if they were three different animals. You could say the same thing about Virginia Tech; is the Drones kid going to play or is the Wells kid going to play at quarterback. They've kind of gone back and forth a little bit, as well. Drones started the other day. It looked like Wells was ready to go if they wanted him to go as far as pregame goes.

I don't think it's a big advantage. I know you always ask me that question every week, as a defensive guy --

Q. Once a year.

PAT NARDUZZI: Once a year? But I think you've just got to play a quarterback, and sometimes you just don't know.

Q. If that's the case, then why are coaches so secret?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's a great question. I don't know. I

can't answer that. Great question, though.

What am I being secretive about? You're saying I'm being secretive?

Q. About quarterback.

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know. It's only Monday. Maybe Thursday I'll have a better idea for you. Still might not tell you, but I'll know more by Thursday for sure.

Q. Did you feel like Christian was prepared to come in when he was called upon?

PAT NARDUZZI: Absolutely, yeah, absolutely. And Nate Yarnell is, too. Just so you know, Nate Yarnell last week, I love this kid. He said, Coach, I want to go down on the scout field and help out the defense. Like you're talking about team guy. Would he have been prepared to go in there? No. He'll be more prepared this week.

But like I said to him, I said, we need you down here. He said, Coach, I know what I'm doing; I'm ready to go.

And again, he is. He's proved that. He sits in there and soaks information up in meetings in there. He knows what's going on. So I feel really good.

Now, I feel better about him than anybody knowing what to do because he's done it before. You've got that evidence when we pulled him up last year at Western Michigan, you knew this guy -- he wasn't sitting there going, I ain't going to play, I ain't going to pay attention and not take notes. Nate Yarnell was taking notes and he was ready, and that's impressive.

Q. Where do you think your pass rush is right now after four games? Your defense hasn't been as dominant as it has been in previous years.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I don't know where we are sack numbers. I think it's maybe better than I thought it was going to be based on who we lost. I don't know how many sacks we got against Drake Maye last year but it wasn't five. Five sacks in a game was pretty good. I think two sacks a day the week before. Five -- I don't know how many times he passed it, but 2 out of 10 the week before, EJ told me, so that's 20 percent sacks. If we got five out of how many times he passed it Saturday, it probably doesn't equal to 20 percent, so you can only get as pressure as they're letting you, so I think that all plays into it.

But again, you can't compare numbers based on plays and all that. You just don't know.

I worry about the ones when he scrambles. There's one down in the red zone the other day where Shane kind of adds himself in to the left and he goes to the right. That's something we don't want to do. I'd rather Shane sit right there and wait for him to take off running and hit him, and Shane is awesome at that. So we've got to clean that up a little bit. Those are just little things.

He's what we call a three match player, and if his three stays in there he should stay over the top of him, but if you go in the front door and he goes out the back door, it's a problem, so those are just little things that we'll clean up here based on the protection, based on who stays in and all that. There's a lot that goes into it. It's not just standard spy quarterback. That's not what he's supposed to do, but --

Q. You're averaging three and a half sacks a game; that's 11th in the country. But the numbers aside, when you watch the game and watch the tape, does it feel like the pass rush is impacting the quarterback and having the effect -- not just the sack numbers --

PAT NARDUZZI: It didn't affect him Saturday, I can tell you that. If we brought six, that dude was getting the ball out and our guys were running free and turning around, looking at where the ball is being thrown. Like he got it out as fast as I've seen any quarterback ever get it out. He knew where to go with the ball. He was fast with it and he was accurate.

We kind of knew that going into the game. We went back and looked. We kind of -- so we kind of cooled it on that, but when you did dial it up -- we dialed it up a heck of a lot less than we did or would have done had we not known what we were dealing with. Maybe that's why our coverage was so good.

When you look at it -- again, they made some plays down the field, just some great -- one time he did. I will mention this. He did run out of bounds and come back in and catch the ball. I don't know if you guys noticed that or not, but I thought that was a violation. He didn't get pushed out, either.

Q. How did Kyle Louis play?

PAT NARDUZZI: Kyle Louis is a physical, fast, aggressive -- I love the way he plays. He can play a little bit more under control. He missed a couple tackles, I think three. If you go back and look at it, that's just young guy stuff. He's just so fast. But he will get better rep after rep. I'm excited about his future.

But was he perfect? No. Again, nobody is, obviously. But

he had a good day, but he could have a great day.

Q. You mentioned details. How much did penalties play a factor in what we saw Saturday? What was the conversation or the talking points about that?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, penalties play a part, period, and some are on us, whether it's a taunting after a big hit. But penalties are certainly an issue. Discipline we talked about last night and making smarter decisions and not being selfish.

But I'm not going to get fined on a Monday. It's been eight and a half years, I'm not getting fined on a Monday, so I'll just leave it at that.

Q. What were you told on the illegal substitution penalty towards the end of the first half?

PAT NARDUZZI: They thought it took too much time. Am I allowed to say that, EJ? They thought it took too much time, but I've got great videotaped evidence that that's baloney.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, again, I'd say it's still too early to tell. Tried to finish up until, shoot, 9:30 last night with North Carolina, got deep into the night with some of that and then this morning.

I would say, again, they're very young up front, I'd say offensive line wise. They've had some injuries on defense, so depending on who they get back depends on what team we're going to face.

They're still aggressive. I think they do a good job coaching. You can see the coaching on the field.

But I would say injuries have plagued them on defense, a little bit on offense and they're young up front. They don't have a ton of stars. Last two weeks some of the guys, the starters and the physicalness we've seen the last two weeks, you see younger offense.

Q. On Goncalves, do you anticipate he'll be back next year?

PAT NARDUZZI: That's something him and his family have to decide. That's up to him. Find out where he is, how he felt he played in two and a half games, and it's too hard to say. Again, as I've talked to the family, it's a matter of him just taking -- he's got time. First thing is just get healthy first and then worry about where you are there.

But if he's a first- or second-rounder probably should go, just like I would recommend to everybody. If he's going to be a third or fourth, if the NFL comes back and says, stay in school, he probably should listen to that. So it's all something they've got to make a decision.

Q. Any details on that injury or not?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know. I usually don't. But I would say maybe Matt should do that. I just don't want to violate his HIPAA and whatever, all that stuff.

Q. Can you say whether he's having surgery?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes. He did have surgery today.

Q. Since 2017 take from that experience tell your team right now?

PAT NARDUZZI: 2017, I don't remember that. How did we finish in 2017? Do you remember? 5-7. So we've got to finish better than 5-7. You can't take -- I don't think you'd take anything from 2017. Our guys weren't here I don't think, and you've got to take it day by day and you just keep plugging away. That's what you do. Your plan doesn't change. The intensity gets cranked up and we coach away.

Q. Cade Johnson had a kickoff return for a touchdown against UNC. How important is it for a true freshman to be able to do that in a game?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, again, just like the quarterback situation, just like everything in the game, as Coach Cignetti always says, it's the ultimate team game and Kenny looked outstanding, but let me tell you, the blocks that he had, go back and watch the tape and go from the tackle to the guard to the center.

Brandon George had a critical block on a safety. He was supposed to pick up his guy -- one guy, he missed him and couldn't get him, so what do you do? You don't run down in coverage, he turned around, got another guy.

Again, Kenny can run. Kenny made great cuts. The other 10 guys did all the work there really when you look at it, and it's a great play by him, but you guys see great returners sit back there and get smashed. It depends on your blocking. It's a great job by Coach Powell and the rest of those guys on that team that get no credit at all. But they did a great job blocking for Kenny, and we can keep doing that.

I think the blocking up there has been good, but again, you sit there and look back and go, it can be good this week

and then crappy next week, just like our punt team. So we need to get that straight.

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