

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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## Pat Narduzzi

### Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: One week removed from another tough game. Had a chance just to kind of relax. Hope you guys had a chance to get away for a week and relax as well.

Hopefully we got our guys freshened up ready for the second half of the season is really the focus now at this point. You can't look back. You look forward.

Obviously nobody in our program is happy with where we are right now. We've set an expectation and a bar up here the last few years, and we're not reaching it. Again, it goes to everybody that sits in this room on a normal day here to get it done. Coaches coach, and players play. So nobody's happy.

I think that's the important thing, and everybody's working their tails off to get better. Again, the focus has got to be on us and what we're doing. Even though we've got the No. 15 team in the country coming in here, focus has to be on us executing and doing our job to make things better. It's not an easy task, as you guys know, but it's what we do as coaches and what we enjoy.

Obviously last week we made a change at the quarterback spot. I got a ton of confidence in Phil Jurkovec, I still do. Even if you won't and don't, I still do. But it felt like we needed a spark at that position to see what happens. So that's kind of what we did. So Christian will be the guy lined up there and expect to have a good week this week, as we did last week at that position, and kind of see what happens.

Again, got a lot of faith in him and Nate Yarnell as well. That's kind of where we are there, and we'll kind of see where we go as far as the quarterback position goes.

As far as Louisville, and then I'll let you guys ask questions, again, the No. 14 or 15 team in the country. Jeff Brohm, my first time going against him, but I've known him for a while. I think he's an excellent football coach. He's an offensive guy. His brother Brian is the offensive coordinator, and they obviously do a great job game planning.



They've got not only a top 15 team, they've got a top 20 offense in just about every category. They've got the Jordan kid No. 25 at tailback. He's Abanikanda speed-wise. He's not as big as Issy, but he's physical. If you hit a hole and you don't hit it right, if you miss it, he's gone, like you saw Issy a year ago. He's had explosive screens, runs. He's done it all. He's got great hands out of the backfield.

And then the Plummer kid at quarterback is an older guy that he's worked with in the past at Purdue. They're talented at receiver as well. They've got probably maybe as talented a receiving crew as we're going to see this year. Again, just explosive on offense in every way with the receivers, with the running back. Just a team that we've got to make sure we limit the explosive, which we've done a decent job of this year.

Then defensively, again, multiple fronts. We're going to see probably three major fronts. So we'll see four down, three down combination, different stuff, and they're aggressive up front. Their strength is their defensive line. The Gillotte kid up front is a football player, but they've got multiple guys that can rush the quarterback and put pressure. So we'll have to be really good in protection.

Again, they're stingy in the run game. They're in the top ten probably stopping the run as well. So it's a heck of a challenge that's walking in here, and we'll work from there. Questions?

**Q. How did the quarterback change come about? Did you approach Frank? Did he approach you? Did it come up organically?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Frank ultimately is going to make that decision. But we had conversations for sure. I think any time you step overboard and say, hey, I think you need to do this, I just don't think it works well. But Frank ultimately makes that call, and I'll either say yea or nay.

Again, like I said, we've got faith in Phil, and you were hoping to see what you saw in practice. Again, like I said, we're going to find out where we move from here. Again, Phil's an unbelievable guy. Phil will do whatever you ask him to do. He just wants to win. He doesn't care.



Phil took it like a champion, like I expected him to. Like I said, Phil will do anything we ask him to do. He'll run down on a kickoff. He'll play defensive end. He'll do anything.

**Q. When did you make the change? Did it start with the bye week?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes.

**Q. Will he play tight end then?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No. Again, rumors get out there, I guess, whatever you want to call it. He's been in the quarterback meetings. He's a quarterback, and that's what he is. Could he be a tight end someday? Yeah, but I'm talking down the line. He's a quarterback here at Pitt.

**Q. In the depth chart for the game notes, is he listed as No. 3 on the quarterback depth chart?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Who?

**Q. Phil.**

PAT NARDUZZI: He's listed as No. 2 right now, but we'll see how the week goes.

**Q. Did Phil run routes this past week at practice?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Did he run routes?

**Q. Yes.**

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't remember. No, he didn't run any routes in a team period at all, ever.

**Q. What about in the drill setting, did he run any routes?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't recall. If he runs routes, he's a tight end?

**Q. I'm just asking the question.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Okay.

**Q. The discussion you had (indiscernible), did you have that before the Virginia Tech game. Did you quantify a change?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No.

**Q. How did the team respond to this? This is a huge change for Phil, a guy who a lot of people have been behind, something you guys haven't had to deal with**

**for a while.**

PAT NARDUZZI: How did the team respond? I don't go ask, hey, what do you guys think? You've got to do what you've got to do. It's never an easy decision when you do something like that. That's why you take your time and do it the right way.

It's just one of those things. I didn't ask, hey, how do you guys feel? Do you feel better? Do you feel worse? It doesn't really matter. We've got to go out and play, and we've got to all execute -- offensively, defensively, and special teams. We've got to go out and execute. It doesn't matter who's sitting back there. We're going to need everybody around him to play well.

**Q. But have they had more sit-down conversations with Christian to help him get up to speed? What's been the team reaction to help Christian be ready for his first start?**

PAT NARDUZZI: There's really been no discussion. I've met with the them. Unless they've discussed stuff on their own. Christian's been ready. I don't think there's like this get ready. Christian's not going to be any more ready than he is and will be on Thursday afternoon.

**Q. You said you needed a spark?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I just think you've got to change it up at some point, and you've got to figure out if that's going to help at all. I can't tell you it's going to. We've got to execute around him. I think that's the key.

I've said that for five weeks, and I'm going to stick to it because it's a fact. Everybody's got to execute around together.

**Q. Was thinking about where your quarterback situation will be next year part of the consideration at all? Maybe getting Christian some experience.**

PAT NARDUZZI: No, it's about right now. The future is next Saturday at 6:30 on the CW Network. That's the future. We're not worried about next year. We've got plenty of time to worry about next year.

**Q. (Indiscernible) wants to talk about how Nate Yarnell helped out on the scout team. Will Phil help out on the scout team now?**

PAT NARDUZZI: He would. We haven't discussed that, but he could go down there and throw it. I know he would. Maybe it's something we'll play around with. We feel pretty good with what we've got down there, but he could go

down there and do that as well.

I want to keep him locked into quarterback, though. We keep three quarterbacks down. I'd probably say that's not going to happen.

**Q. In the time you've seen him, what have you seen from Christian? What do you like about Christian's game?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Christian has got a great release. You've seen a little bit of him play this year so far. He's got a great quick release. He throws a great ball. He can sling it around. He's athletic, and he's fired up. So I think he wants to have his opportunity, and we're going to find out what he looks like Saturday night.

**Q. What do you notice is the biggest difference with Louisville under Brohm as opposed to what you saw the last couple years?**

PAT NARDUZZI: It's very similar. Satterfield and what they did last year and what they did the year before during the COVID year -- I forget what year we played them. They've got a lot of transfers in right now, that's the first thing. They've got, I think a Jackson State and a Georgia State transfer. So they've got two hungry guys out there at receiver.

The receivers are physical. They make plays. They're quick. They get out of their breaks well. Again, they will block you. I'm impressed with their toughness.

I just think Brohm does a great job scheming you up, but they're a talented football team for sure.

**Q. Is this the most balanced offense you think your defense will face? At least at this point in the season.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, you go back to the Virginia Tech game, and we're on the field for almost 40 minutes, had 59 rushes. Our goal is to hold people to 3.3 yards per carry. We held them to 3.4 yards. It felt like it was 10.8 yards per carry is what it felt like because you felt like you're out there all day, and you couldn't stop that little toss count or read.

They're playing with a wildcat quarterback, the Drones kid, so when you look at the balance there. But then he was able to hit three passes on us, which was disappointing. Got a little pushoff, and we're looking back for the ball too early, almost ten yards. We're looking back for the ball and get nudged off, perfect pass. We gave up two other big passes in that game. So we've got to be better on defense stopping the run.

And going back to the Louisville and the balance, yeah, it's a balance. You've got to play both. They're having success in the run game and the passing game. So it is a lot more balanced. However, you look at Virginia Tech, and they average almost 12 yards per pass and 3.4 yards per run. But it looked like it was the opposite, but it wasn't.

**Q. How often did you practice last week?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Twice. Just like we normally do, nothing more, nothing less. Practiced on Wednesday, Thursday.

**Q. With the way Phil performed in some of the games, are you at all concerned with your offensive staff's ability to evaluate talent? You said he was good in practice, but it didn't translate.**

PAT NARDUZZI: It would start with me evaluating talent. We brought every one of these guys in. You look back, and as a coach, you're always going to be optimistic. You look, and you're going to keep replacing guys. We lost a lot of good football players the year before.

I'll say that week 5 or week 6, or in the open week, when you look back, but we just haven't made the plays we need to. We have a different quarterback. You go from Kenny Pickett for five years where you've got another quarterback and then another quarterback, and we just haven't gotten a groove. It's just evaluating talent.

I can tell you this, the quarterback is the most important position on the football team. When you talk about evaluate a quarterback, it starts with me. We've just got to do a better job at that position. Again, like I said, it's not all the quarterback.

But I like our talent on our football team. We've just got to execute better. We've got to coach them better and call better plays.

**Q. Without getting too specific, how important was this past week for health reasons, for getting healthier and to remedy some of those injuries?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Okay. It wasn't as good as you want it to be. It wasn't as good as you want it to be. I'll leave it right there.

It wasn't as good as you want it to be. In the open week, you're not happy, and we got some guys banged up in the open week because we went out there in shells and played football, which is where we needed to be. I didn't want to be soft. We needed to go out and play football and execute and try to get better fundamentally.

So we got a couple guys even more banged up last week. Hopefully we'll be ready to go. We didn't do ourselves any favors in the open week.

**Q. How did the team react to hearing Christian will be quarterback?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I answered that. I didn't hear any reaction. We didn't make an announcement it was going to happen. There was no cheering. There was no disappointment. There was nothing.

But that's what I expected of our football team. It's business. It can happen at any position in here, whether it's the D-line or receivers or O-line. There's been changes made, whether it's ones you want to make or not make.

I saw no reaction at all. Our guys love each other here. The coaches love the players. It's not an easy thing to do. There's nobody in here going, that's great, thank God. There's none of that. Our guys are together and care for each other.

**Q. Being 1-4, have you and your coaches had the keep your chins up, keep motivating them at 1-4?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You always want to do that. Every week you're motivating them, whether you lost one or lost two in a row or five in a row. But I think that's always a constant.

But I think kids nowadays are resilient. After getting ahead almost 72 hours before we watched it and did all that, they had Sunday off after that game. Shoot, we didn't get home until about 4:00 in the morning anyway. I think they came in, they looked at it, and we go out and try to fix the stuff.

But you can't sit there and dwell on it. Again, I think the coaches will dwell on it more. I've got to motivate the coaches just to get them pumped up. Hey, that was last week. Let's go. As much as the players.

It's a mental game that you play, but that's part of life. We sit there and worry about what happened in our life. In our personal life or our football life, we're going to have problems. You've got to move on and play the situation. It's called adversity. It happens in daily life, and I'm sure everybody in here is going through something.

You've got to move on. You can't be thinking about -- you can't have the poor mes. Our guys don't have that, and I don't think that's a problem.

**Q. On motivating the coaches, are you still spending the bulk of your time in the defensive meeting rooms?**

**Are you spending a little bit more time on the offensive side of the ball just to see what changes they're looking at?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I spend a little bit more time, but like I said, you watch the Pittsburgh Steelers yesterday? I didn't get to watch it, but talk about dominant defense. I'm going to use my time where it's supposed to be and what I can do to help. I am not going to go in there and shuffle it up and say you guys need to try this, do this.

I'll give my tips. I'll give things that I believe and see and coach fundamentals, but when it comes to meeting time, I'm watching a majority of tape -- whatever it is, 80 percent -- on defense. But when I'm on the field, I'm out there watching attitudes and effort on the field.

Practice, I'm there all day long. I don't know if I've mentioned that to you in the past, but I'm there the whole time because that's where I can at least watch the attitude, watch the fundamentals, watch the scout team and make sure they're giving them a good look and pass rushing and not sitting there on the line of scrimmage getting blocked.

**Q. I believe it's been four different offensive line units in five games. How do you go about evaluating that room with so much turnover, injuries, that kind of stuff, especially during a bye week?**

PAT NARDUZZI: It's next man up. There's nothing -- I look at the Giants quarterback a couple weeks ago getting sacked 11 times. Man, he got sacked 11 times, it could get worse, I guess. And they get free agents. They get to pull guys in off the waivers and replace those guys and pay them a lot of money to do it. We can't do that.

The guys in Coach Borbely's room aren't going to change. We have what we have right now. The injuries are what they were, what they are, and we need to go play. When you compare it to things like that, it's our job to get them coached up, and that's what it is.

There's no free agency. You're not going in the portal in the middle of the season to get a new guy, and that's we have. I'll take our guys, and it's our job to coach them up. We've got to get better.

**Q. Have there been any discussions when Jake comes back, if he'll be playing center or be moved back to guard?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We haven't had that discussion yet. Just worried about getting him back first, and then we'll figure that out when the time comes. If we sit there before he's totally back, whatever that is, by that time, there might be

somebody else out there, and the plan changes. So you don't make decisions until you know exactly where everybody is and where we are.

**Q. I know you said you guys practiced twice, but have you seen or heard the Christian working more with the receivers and tight ends kind of get into a flow with the first team guys, develop more chemistry, especially during the off week?**

PAT NARDUZZI: If they did it, they did it on their own. I can't tell you they have gone out there. Besides the two practices, we had a couple of feet meets as well, where our guys go out and work with it. They've been together.

The thing is with our practices -- and you guys were there early in the practice during the week. It's not like we say, Phil, you throw just to the ones and, Christian, you throw to the twos. It's them rotating out there. There's no matching it up where, hey, you only throw to the ones and you only throw to the twos. It's not what we have done or have ever done.

They've thrown to each other before. I don't think there's any time -- there's going to be a natural timing issue, but there's nothing you can do about that. It's not something you can gain in a week.

**Q. You called this Christian's opportunity. He's obviously going to start Saturday. Is he the starter until -- or are you essentially evaluating him on Saturday?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I think everybody gets evaluated, you know. Phil's been evaluated for five weeks. We're going to take that body of work that he puts in Saturday and look at it and keep him on his feet and let him go. But we're going to do whatever we've got to do to win a football game.

**Q. You said a lot of times about not having a quick look, not wanting to make a quick reaction through the first five games. Do you kind of have to reset the clock now? Give Christian more of the same?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No question. I'm not going to pull the plug on him either. I don't think you pull the plug on anybody. He's got to go out and execute. We expect that. We'll see how it goes. Everybody around him has got to get it done.

**Q. When you look at the transfer QBs that have come in, Peterman obviously had some success.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Some? He was pretty good.

**Q. Yeah. Max had some injuries and didn't really get to play at the level he wanted to. Kedon --**

PAT NARDUZZI: I liked Kedon a lot. He was a good football player.

**Q. Somewhat inconsistent. Last year with Phil having his issues, do you have to reevaluate maybe how you approach the portal with that position?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You do, but again, as soon as you do that, you handicap yourself in a different situation. Who knows? Again, it's everybody around him as well. You look at some of these teams out here, even Louisville, how they have taken a ton of transfer guys. You look at Colorado, taking a ton.

What's right? What's wrong? Maybe we should have taken -- forget the quarterback, maybe we should have taken more offensive linemen. You can look at the whole thing. Maybe we play with too many young high school guys and we've got to take older guys. Maybe we need junior and senior and keep going to the portal and not recruit high school guys.

I'm not sure what's wrong and what's right, but I really like developing guys. At the quarterback spot, when you have a guy leave, you've got to get another guy. You don't want to have three freshmen quarterbacks. You're kind of stuck doing that sometimes.

**Q. You needed a spark. What about Christian's mental makeup do you think will give you that?**

PAT NARDUZZI: If he goes out and makes some throws, makes some plays, that's how you get a spark. Just something different, and we'll find out. We'll find out Saturday night.

**Q. As much as we focus on the offensive quarterback change, how much was the focus the defense had to have to get back to the identity you guys have had for the past year? Stopping the run and getting after the quarterback.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Thanks for asking about defense. Like I said, the Pittsburgh Steelers, they win championships with just defense, right? I watch what they do. I see some highlights. After a staff meeting yesterday, I walked in just as Pickens, the last ten yards of that big pass, I didn't know what happened. I had it on in my office, but I was never in my office. I had it on CBS or ABC, whatever it was. I put it on when I got into the office.

We've got to play championship defense. We've got to get better. We've got to make more plays. We missed a lot of tackles last week. We've been solid, but not where we need to be. We need to get off the field and give the ball back to our offense, and our offense needs to sustain drives and not go throw three and out, put the defense in bad spots with the turnovers.

**Q. Did you guys use the bye week to focus on things to get better?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes, no doubt about it. Did a lot of stuff. Did more tackling drills. That's why we've got guys banged up.

**Q. Phil was the one who told his teammates about the change, right? If that's so, what's that say about him that he didn't quit and he wanted to tell his guys about all this?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Phil is a great kid. I mean, if you guys knew Phil, you'd love him to death. Like I said, he's a team player. He'll do anything you ask him to do. He just wants to win. That tells you a lot about the character of Phil.

**Q. That made it pretty difficult to make that change?**

PAT NARDUZZI: It's difficult to make any change. I don't want to say the quarterback is different than any other one, but it's a guy that's run the show for five weeks. It's not easy any time. It's never easy.

**Q. Is Phil helping Christian in terms of like the playbook and just based on his experience? He's obviously played a lot longer.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, if Christian's got questions, he's going to ask Phil. But Christian's been in the same meeting room with Phil for -- he's been there with him. They came in together pretty much in January. So they've been in the meeting room.

I listen back during practice and listen, he should have thrown it here, should have thrown it there. They have those conversations every day. So I don't think that's going to change. But whether it's Christian in there and the quarterback's evaluating what he's doing during practice, they all talk. Hey, it looked like the safety went through the middle of the field. The middle of the field was closed.

They're talking and having those conversations every day, every period, every drill.

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