

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

Monday, October 30, 2023
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Head Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Good morning. How are we doing today? All right. Are you guys ready? Cameras ready?

All right. We had a great Sunday night meeting in here you know after an emotional Saturday afternoon and evening. But, you know, started off with my players, first thing I said as I sat here at the podium was you know apologizing to our football team and to our guys about my postgame comments, which didn't, obviously, come out the way I intended them to come out. And sometimes that happens.

But when I looked at it over the last, really, 48 hours, 24 hours, you know, there's nothing worse than a loss. A loss hurt. And the first thing I do is jump on the plane, and I'm watching the video on my iPad. But the loss hurts. And everybody in that locker room was hurt.

But when you feel like your players are hurt by something the head coach said, that hurts you even worse. It makes you sick to your stomach. So I didn't get a whole lot of sleep on Saturday night. I can promise you that. But, you know, I talk about our guys all the time about our program goals. And I won't get into four of them, which have been here since I've been here eight and a half seasons is relationships. It's the number one thing we talk about all the time. And the relationships that I have with our players is critical. And that never, ever can change.

And when you don't have a relationship with your team, you've got an issue. And, again, I had a great team meeting with them last night. I think they know where I'm coming from or where I was coming from. I think they get it. Relationships is everything. It's why I coach. It's what I do. It's what I've done for years. And, you know, to me, it's always been, you know, the players love the coaches and the coaches love the players. If you don't have that, you got issues.

So I feel really good where we are going into this week. Obviously, we closed a chapter on the game last night as



well with a special teams meeting in here that we always finish with and watched some things we did on special teams or didn't do. You know, prior to that, we watched offense and defense.

And when you look at it again it all starts with me. I wasn't happy with the way we got prepared or the way we played. If we don't play good, it comes back to me. So I, obviously, didn't have the guys ready to play like I'd like to. Our coordinators, obviously, didn't have the guys ready to play like we'd like to on either side of the ball. It always comes back to us. And I always say this. It's about the details. It's about the inches.

If we're not getting that done, to me, what you see is what you coach. And somehow we've got to get it executed better. I know we've got a lot of young guys playing. And I think experience is your best teacher. And, you know, I look at Christian, who's really played well since he's taken over that starting job. He, obviously, didn't play his best game. But you watch some of the great plays he makes, and you're like, yeah. Okay? But I go back to you look at experience is critical. He hasn't even played as many games as Kenny Pickett played his freshman year when he came in and played four games as a true freshman. And, you know, he will get much better every game. And experience is the best teacher. And you can't force feed that.

We have to have patience as coaches. And that's just one position I'm talking about. But every position's the same way. I've got to do a better job making sure they're ready to go. Our coaches have got to do a better job of making sure we get it, whether we've got to keep it simpler and cut back on offense and defense just to make sure we execute better. Because it comes down to execution. And if they're not executing, it's half on us and half on them. It's a team win and a team loss whenever we stand in here. So we've got to do a better job. And, again, the big thing is you learn from them and you hope you don't make the same mistakes twice.

A lot of things we worked on that we saw, and we just didn't react to it well against a great football team. And so we'll clean those up. And that's what our guys do. That's what we do as coaches.

And, again, I think patience for us has got to be key for our



coaches to continue to move. And then we've got probably the best team we're going to play of the year. I think they're ranked fourth in the country. USA Today had them at 2 for a long time. And I watched them earlier in the year. I've had a chance to peek at them. And, you know, Jordan Travis -- Mike Norvell has done an outstanding job there in his time there. And he's an excellent coach. He's also the offensive coordinator. I think Jordan Travis is playing about as high level as any quarterback in the country. We've got a great football team.

And that's kind of where our focus is going, right to them. We focused on that last night after our team meeting. We break up and go offense/defense again and just get onto the new page. I think that's always a good way to end our meetings. So we're ready to go. And it's Monday, so let's go.

Questions.

Q. Have your players expressed any concern to you about your remarks? Did they come to you and say they were concerned about what you said?

PAT NARDUZZI: No. No. I went to them first. I talked to some guys on the airplane, to be honest with you. But I think, you know, you only get pieces of things sometimes in the world we're in. I think they feel good. Like I said, nine years -- you know, nobody is -- nobody is, I guess, graded on one night, whether it's a player or whether it's a coach. And whether it's your play or whether it's what you say. And nobody -- there's always another Saturday. And there's always another presser. There's always the next.

So, to me, you're not defined in one game or one afternoon. You're defined over time. And I think over time, my guys are my guys. I love my guys. Shoot, the only thing -- my message to them -- I know how bad they're hurting after that loss. But my major message was, hey, guys, I don't care. I love you guys. I wouldn't trade you for anything, period. Those are my guys. And that's the way it always will be.

Q. You said the way it came out was, quote, not the way I intended. What were you trying to convey in that moment?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I don't even think it's up for discussion. I really don't need to get into it, Will. But it comes down to experience. Okay. And I obviously did a poor job about it. It doesn't even matter at this point, so I'd rather just move on.

Q. Did any of your players give you any sort of feedback when you talked to them about your

postgame remarks?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. They were all good and said, Coach, I totally understand. They were all great. I've had meetings with them last night. Even individual, if someone wanted to come see me and also a couple this morning that I caught back up with. I said, Hey, my door is always open down there, okay. My door is always open, whether I'm in a meeting -- Vicky will pull me out of a meeting. I'm going to meet with our guys all the time. So the door is always open. I think they all get it pretty clear.

Q. Pat, when you have --

PAT NARDUZZI: And there's no excuses. It doesn't matter what I intended. There's no excuses. It doesn't matter.

Q. When you have something like that that gets that kind of attention and you've got kids in six, eight weeks that you're going to want to come to sign a commitment here, do you worry that that sort of comment can play outside this room and the people that might be considering coming here might --

PAT NARDUZZI: I think, again, you're graded over what you've done for nine years, okay. And you can go back to Phil Jurkovec for five weeks or whatever week it was where it's loyalty. I always have loyalty to our football team, period. And you can look at that and then you can look at one six-second snippet, and which one are you going to go with? So that's up to you.

Q. (Question comparing Christian to Kenny Pickett.)

PAT NARDUZZI: I think it's every player, you know. I mean, you look at Terrence Enos played a really darn solid game at right tackle. His first start. He had five plays up until Saturday, guys. I mean, we look at the inexperience we have on our field. He did a heck of a job. And again, you know, he's only going to get better from it. But guys learn, again, whether it's Kenny Pickett. I mean, everybody said he had a breakout year in '21, wins the championship, right? Nobody was talking about him in 2020 or '19. And, again, all of a sudden, like, what happened? Okay. Well, it's called experience. I think, like I said, that's the deal. I mean, when Damar Hamlin -- I'll go back to another position. You could talk about Clyde -- when Damar Hamlin graduated, I'm like, whoo. I probably sat in here probably after -- whether it was in the spring or -- spring ball, like, replacing today Damar Hamlin, that's big shoes to fill. That guy was a football player and did a great job at that free safety spot, which I think is our most critical. And Eric was the guy to step up. And you didn't know he was going to step up like he did. Okay? But experience. He

may have started slow that '21 season, but he finished strong and finished strong in '22. So it's just experience.

I mean, guys, the only way you learn is when you get beat. I hate to tell you. You get beat, you learn. If you only have success, then maybe you didn't play anybody. But you're going to win and you learn based on experiences and whether it's a right tackle in Terrence Enos or Damar Hamlin, it doesn't matter what it is. We've got some experienced positions on our football team, and we've got some inexperience. And those are growing pains that -- like I said to our coaches, we've got to be patient with them. And we've got to do a better job coaching them. We've got to do a better job coaching them. I told them 10 times, tell them 12 times, tell them 15 times. Just keep telling them. That's what we do.

Q. Your upcoming opponent, what stands out? There's so much that stands out. But what do you think is going to be the most difficult thing to defend with this offense?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's Wilson on one side and Keon Coleman on the other side and Travis -- I mean, you cover those guys, he's taking off running. He is athletic. He's smart. Obviously, Coach Norvell does a great job. And, again, we played him in -- we played Travis in two thousand -- what was it, '20, during the COVID year and got him down there, and he ended up getting hurt before the half, I believe. And he had a big run on us early. And we kind of got experience from that first run that he took, 80 yards or whatever it was. We had a defensive end run up the field, and you learn. It's a play he didn't see. And you learn. And then all of a sudden, we shut it down and made the play. But Travis was a different player in 2020 than he is right now. Correct? I mean, I don't know how many games they won in '20. I haven't gone back and looked at that. But you look at where he is and what experience has done for him, period.

We can talk Kenny Pickett. We can talk him as well. He's playing at a high level. What's he got? 18 TDs and 2 interceptions? The guy doesn't make mistakes. And he's confident. The guy place with swagger too. He gets a run, he looks like he's a linebacker, just the emotion. He plays with emotion and passion. He is the leader of that football team, guaranteed.

Q. (No microphone.) The only team in the country that's allowed less than 50 percent completions. What makes their secondary so good?

PAT NARDUZZI: Every good secondary has a good D-line. Right? They've got some athletic ends that rush up the field, one from the University of Albany that's a game

wrecker. He's special. But they got athletes all over the field. They're athletic. They're well coached. And I've had great conversations with Mike Norvell through the years. And he -- his team plays with toughness, physicality, and they believe. And they play hard. And that's what our football team is like. And I think he's got the same kind of thing.

Q. Do you worry about that belief being affected by what happened on Saturday?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not at all. Not at all. Again, coaches aren't happy with Saturday and neither are the players. The players know. They watch the tape. It's our job as coaches to put our guys in positions to make plays. Sometimes we do; sometimes we don't. Sometimes we're in a position to make plays and we don't make them. That's physical. We talk about structural is probably a coach. Man, that was a terrible call versus that play they had. And then there's the physical and the mental. And there was some physical errors and there's mental errors. And that's where our guys aren't happy about how they executed. And sometimes really good teams like Notre Dame -- Notre Dame was a really good football team, really good. And they lost to Ohio State by 3 at home. And, you know, gave up 17 points to the Buckeyes and knocked the heck out of USC. So it's a good football team. We didn't get beat by an average football team.

Q. You have quite a lot of young guys this year or guys at least that are new here, when they have those sort of struggles, do you have to approach that differently than if you had a veteran team that had sort of been through the ups and downs and you can say, yeah, I'm sure they're going to bounce back?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. You've got to treat them all the same because the standard is the standard, right? Every Saturday we go out, we believe we're going to win. Okay? Again, like I said, it's my fault. Mentally, we've got to be locked in to the point we execute. Ultimately, it comes down to motivation and being totally locked in to what your job is. And whether they were or whether they weren't, it's still my fault if it doesn't get done.

Q. How do you address some of the errors that were made on special teams on Saturday?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, just keep going back to the drawing board. I was under the understanding one of Junko's punt hit a wire up there, which I would hope someone would see. I don't know if they put an electric fence up there, hit the sky cam, whatever. You know, we had a couple high snaps, which we haven't had all year. I've seen high snaps go over people's heads and not be

caught. So there's a lot of good things on tape, guys. I mean, when you look at it offensively, defensively, there's some shots we missed that we threw to and missed. There's some shots offensively that we looked to the wrong side of the field.

Again, comes with experience and understanding the coverages and just taking your time in the pocket and not rushing your throws. But when there's pressure at times with guys coming off the edge or coming up the middle, sometimes that happens. But some of the special teams, man, we got to address is just to finish. I mean, that first -- that first punt return, which was a punch in the gut, we got two guys on the tackle. We just didn't finish. Again, I give that guy credit because he's a good punt returner. But those are things I think our guys were disappointed. It's not like we were nowhere to be found. Again, our job is to -- we had a good net on that one.

And like I said, I may have mentioned this after the -- after the press -- after the game, there's nobody I trust more than MJ Devonshire to return a punt. He's got a nice fair catch at the 10 yard line one time, and he doesn't call fair catch. Guys become desperate at times to make a play. And MJ's a playmaker. And sometimes we've got to take that Superman cape off your back and make sure you play within the framework of the team. And a lot of faith in him and, you know, he's just trying to make a play. And you can't do that.

Q. The last two years, you've brought in four quarterbacks. Do you feel a little bit better about the position with Christian?

PAT NARDUZZI: I feel great with Christian. I feel great with Nate Yarnell. You saw how he performed when he got in there too. I said that back in camp. Each one of them continue to grow every week. Is Christian where he is right now compared to where he was game one or fall camp, he's way far ahead. I think every week he becomes more confident in what he's doing and how he's doing it. And every week, he sees a different coverage or sees this or that and has a better feel of what he's got to do. It's only going to make him better. And I feel good with that quarterback room.

Q. I think we ask you about running backs just about every week. But I'm curious, what does Rodney need to do to get more opportunities, get more carries?

PAT NARDUZZI: Rodney ran well on Saturday. Rodney ran well. We obviously got into throwing it a little more than we'd like to. However, the game plan going in was really to throw it. If you go back and watch the tapes in slow motion -- I don't know if you guys have the all 11 like

we do. I don't think you do. But you watch a TV copy, you don't see really where the routes are, what they did. Even on the pick six, we hope he hits the hole shot, which is there's a guy wide open. They're playing a two-trap. But that comes with experience. And every quarterback's gone through that

Q. Your wiggle room is out, is gone if you wanted to be bowl eligible is gone. Is that something that even comes up at this point, or are you just trying to --

PAT NARDUZZI: 1 and 0. 1 and 0. You know, hey, we played a great team last week. We're playing a greater team this week. Our focus is on Florida State. We get them at home. I hope it's 32 degrees out and the field -- I think we're going to let the grass grow because it's a fast football team. And, you know, we're playing one at a time. And I'm not worried about bowl eligibility. I care about winning a football game. And I care about coaching our football team and getting them prepared to play that game physically, mentally, and emotionally

Q. Gavin came out of that game with no targets. Was Notre Dame focusing on him? Was that somebody that wasn't available to you?

PAT NARDUZZI: We probably rotated our tight ends maybe more than we should have. But we try to keep those guys fresh. I actually had a conversation with Gavin this morning. I called him. I think he had 27 total snaps. But usually our tight ends are getting more snaps. We didn't go much 12 personnel because we didn't like 12 against Notre Dame just because of what the box was going to look like and how they would play us if we put everybody in the box.

And so you didn't get the two tight ends that are getting more snaps. We just kept those guys fresh if they're running routes. So they were bounced out of more -- as a head coach, I'd like to see Gavin obviously get more targets and play more plays. I think we've got to keep him on the field.

Q. You said you called him this morning. Is that what you were trying to communicate?

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, I asked him, Hey, how are you doing? No doubt about it, like, you only had 27. How are you doing? I wasn't happy with it when I saw the play count

Q. (Question about splash plays earlier in the season.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Just got to hit him. Got to see him, got to him hit, got to protect him. Again, it's a team game.

Takes 11 guys, whether it's pressure one time or not seeing a crossing route, whatever it may be, or the receiver's not running fast enough across the field to get in the quarterback's vision. There's little details. They're trying to sometimes sit in holes and, you know, depending on the coverage -- but we've got to get in front of the quarterback. We've got to make throws. And we've got to make catches. And we've got to protect. It's 11 guys. We, as coaches, have got to put them in a better position to make plays. All the time, not just sometimes.

Q. This is a little off topic. How important is red zone defense as opposed to total defense? Do you consider that, like, that section of the field, do you judge it differently? I don't care how many yards I give up, but when we get to the 20, we've got to stop them?

PAT NARDUZZI: Ultimately, if you get down inside the red zone, our goal is to give up a field goal. That's what we did at the end of the half. That's a win for us when they kick field goals.

But we game plan every situation, whether it's P and 10, normal downs in normal areas of the field. But defensively, we game plan. Offensively, game plan, the same thing. You've got stuff you want to do in the red zone, offensively and defensively. Ultimately, you're graded on what you do when you get to the red zone. Obviously, offensively, we didn't get to the red zone, so that's a place we need to get first before you can execute in the red zone.

Thank you. Have a good one.

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