

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

Anytime you out-rush your opponent, and BC was the No. 1 rush offense going into the weekend in the ACC, and we were able to really contain them pretty good for as good as they are. I think we out-rushed them -- we rushed the ball, so when you run the ball and you stop the run, you've got a chance to win, so I was happy about that.

The turnover ratio we won. Got a couple on defense and didn't give the ball away, which gives you a chance to win.

Before we get into Duke, just make an announcement that Gavin Bartholomew and Devin Danielson are out for the year. Obviously it's one more game left, but both will be not with us this weekend, as well, as far as that goes. It's sad to see for both those guys. Obviously with Danielson being such a tough dude, he's never hurt, and you never thought his senior year, his sixth year would end like it did, and Gavin, obviously lost a major weapon, and Karter Johnson and Epps have really stepped up in his presence the last two weeks. I'm happy for where they are.

Going to play a really good Duke team this weekend, on the road. We need to try to go down on the road and try to replicate what we did this weekend with the details that we did, but Mike Elko does a heck of a job. One of the hotter names in college football right now, all over the place, and he's a great football coach. He's a defensive guy. So they're strong on defense.

Kevin Johnson is their OC who goes back a long, long, long way back to, shoot, he was at Northwestern when I was a linebacker coach at Northern Illinois. He was at Northwestern for a long time, Indiana, so we played them I don't know how many times, a bunch of times.

So it'll be round No. 2 with his offense, and he does a great job offensively. Really smart, detailed, and he knows how to attack you.

We'll have to be ready for that.

Questions?



Q. When you look back and have had time to review the film, there seemed to be several times where Nate was able to go through his progressions and find better options. How much of that is a credit to your offensive line?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think it's a little bit of both. Sometimes it depends on who you're playing against, but the O-line, zero sacks compared to our seven sacks, it's another thing that bounces off the piece of paper as far as what we did in the videotape.

But Nate Yarnell is a guy that can go through his progressions, just like all those guys in those rooms, in that quarterback room. They can go through their progression, not just look at it one way and if it's not there, take off and run, and they've got to be able to go through a progression to get on the field. So that doesn't shock me at all. He's as smart as you're going to find in that room.

Q. You've always made it a point to mention Nate's name, like don't forget about him. What did you see leading up to that game that you liked about him?

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, we like him all the time, and sometimes as coaches you're kind of maybe looking at the most talented guy, but mentally Nate is as talented as anybody in that room, probably the most talented guy mentally.

Like I said a year ago when we took him off that scout field, he wasn't sitting in a room being quiet, not paying attention, and all of a sudden, oh, my gosh, it's my turn. He was prepared, and that's who he is. It didn't shock me at all that Nate did what he did.

Q. What are the expectations for Nate going into Saturday and building off of what he was able to do against Boston College?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's got to go out and do it all over again because nobody cares about what you did last week against BC. I think that's the first thing is let that last one go and now focus on the next one, what do you have to do to win this game, what do you have to do to be successful as a quarterback and as an offense.

Nate is running the show, and he just needs to go out and



do what he does.

Again, I think he's that type of guy that will just go out and do what he needs to do to win the game. He'll be mentally and physically prepared.

Q. How much of Nate's value as a quarterback pertains to just his ability to protect the football?

PAT NARDUZZI: That's any quarterback. I don't care if it's Nate or -- again, you knock on wood, he did it one week, and you've got to do it two weeks, so it's about consistency and being able to repeat what you did, and I think that's the important thing.

We've got to go out and do that because you're playing against a good Duke team that'll do a good job game planning and seeing the whole game on Nate and then we'll find out what he's got. He's got to continue to get better. He can't stay the same.

Q. How soon do you start your self-scouting and season evaluation?

PAT NARDUZZI: First thing we'll get into is recruiting so we're going to hit the road. Postseason evaluation, little by little we'll get to that, but the first thing is the signing day is up in December, and we'll work towards that. But as coaches, we're evaluating every day, and that never stops.

Q. When you look at your staff, how much do you evaluate their performance based on one season versus their body of work with this program?

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, I think you're always looking at the body, but you're looking at the present. To me, the present is the best indicator, so you've got to look at what we did right now, and I think -- again, what you did with what you have. I think that's always what you look at.

Q. Obviously the players are going to respond to the quarterback to lead them to victory. That's going to be the biggest thing. But did you notice anything different with the players on offense and Nate given he's been around for a few years and this is his third year here? Did you notice them responding differently to him?

PAT NARDUZZI: I didn't notice it, but maybe you guys noticed it on the sideline. I wasn't looking back there to see what they do. I think our team has done a nice job responding to anybody that's been in that position to be the starting quarterback. I don't feel or see anything different as far as what they were doing for one guy, and they won't do it for somebody else. I don't see that at all. I see

support. I see our team saying, okay, that's who's got it, and I'm going to support them. I think that's what I feel weekly.

But sorry, probably not what you want to hear, but that's what I see. Sorry.

Q. How do you look at your quarterback group?

PAT NARDUZZI: I like it right now, but again, that can change quickly. Again, you look at Christian is a really good quarterback that's talented, and we'll continue to work with him, and obviously Nate had a heck of a weekend, and we want him to have another great weekend to back that up.

Q. Knowing that you're not going to have the whatever, 10, 15 extra days to prepare for a bowl game like you traditionally have since you've come here, do you treat this game any differently in terms of giving guys whose redshirts are going to be protected looks or anything like that?

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, Isy got in last week, Polk, that is, not to be confused with that other Isy we had a year ago. So we'll get guys in, but just based on what they've done in practice. It's not a, hey, let's play as many guys as we can to see what they've got. We're trying to win a football game. It always comes down to winning and who gives us the best chance to win. We're going to play those guys, and we do lose those bowl practices. We'll miss those kind of, but sometimes I think they're overrated too.

Q. Last year Keegan Buck found out about Phil and then subsequently pulled out ahead of the bowl game. You guys have to find out at the end of season about future plans, transfer portal, coaching decisions. What's the pressure to do that as soon as you guys finish your noon kickoff game again Duke?

PAT NARDUZZI: First thing we do is Monday through Thursday we'll sit down with every player on our team. I'm not sure I'll sit down with every one of them. I'll sit down with most of them, as many as I can, but our coaches will sit down by position with each one of their players, and again, it's a good time for player evaluation to find out where they are, what they're thinking, and what we can do better.

Q. Dayon said after the game that he intends to come back next year. Have you had some of those conversations with guys like him?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, my kids told me that after the game. I was like, oh, good, I didn't know that. But I expected

Dayon to come back. He had a heck of a game, and he's a super kid that just keeps getting better. He's still a baby. Everybody would like him to grow up faster than he is. He's going to be really good in another year. He had spurts a year ago when he did get in there, and then just consistency all the time.

But haven't had -- we're trying to win a football. We've got a lot of other things in our mind. We're not making and having those conversations, just not there. That'll be next week.

Q. On those individual meetings you have with the players, what are those conversations look like? If a guy you feel like might not have an opportunity to play here next year, would you encourage someone to go into the portal?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we've done that before. Guys in a want to play -- a lot of guys want to play, and we've got to talk about Duke today or what? But we'll have those conversations based on who they are and what they've done for the program, period.

Q. Talk about the quarterback room. You have a guy redshirting that's kind of learning, sitting back, Ty Dieffenbach. How has he grown from week one until now?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, no one really knew. He had an injury early in camp. You guys may have seen that out there in practice. I appreciate you guys not saying anything. But he got a little collarbone deal early. But ever since -- he came back quickly, so he's a fast healer. That's good to know. He's done a great job. We've gotten a lot of pass skillies. He hasn't gone live. But we've been excited about his mental preparation and what he's done in that room, and he's athletic. He can run. He can throw. He can think. He's just another guy that we're excited about.

Q. What about scouting Duke? What has made them successful this year?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, again, obviously I think any time you're looking at a successful team, you'd better play good defense. They've played good defense. They're tough. That D-tackle they've got in there, DeWayne Carter, No. 90, you'll see No. 90 on Saturday at noon. We've got noon kickoff; forgot to mention that. But DeWayne Carter is a man up front. He's a house wrecker in there. He's a guy we've got to control, know where he's at and get two bodies on him at times. He'll spin and make moves.

So it starts with him. They've got a good linebacking corps, so defensively they are what they've been, and then

they've had some injuries at quarterback so been a little bit hampered by that two different times where Riley has gotten banged up.

But it's a rush game. They're one of the top rush teams in the conference, as well. So they like to run the ball. They know how to run the ball. They will mix it up. They've got three really good receivers that they'll get the ball to.

They mix it up, and they do a good job scheming you. That's what I would say.

Q. Will you be preparing for two quarterbacks this week?

PAT NARDUZZI: Which two? You know, I don't know. I don't know. I'm not down in their camp. I don't have any cameras on their practices or signals or anything like that. I don't know.

Q. What has Grayson Loftis shown this year?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's a composed young guy that throws the ball well. He's making good decisions. He's got all kinds of signals that he's making to his receivers and running backs. For a young guy he's gotten better and better every game. I think his first start was maybe Wake, and his numbers weren't good, but as you watch it, he's grown each game, and I think this will be his fourth start. He's gone through the learning process, as well.

Q. You mentioned that Dayon is taking some steps. How close is he to being that consistent player that you think he can be?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's really close. It's just being consistent every day, consistent in your life, consistent in what you put on the practice field every single day. Again, everybody matures at a different level, but he's highly talented. It's just putting in the work, and I just got done texting him here a half hour ago just about doing it again this week, stack another week on top because he can take over a game if he puts his mind to it.

It's just being laser focused, which is hard nowadays. You jump on Twitter, you do this, look at that, and you can get off track. But he will put it together just like all our guys at defensive end have through the years.

Q. Can this game set any sort of tone for your off-season?

PAT NARDUZZI: Certainly. I think end of the game, end of the season with a win, finishing with two wins certainly -- we certainly don't have the record or set the standard of

what we want to do, but it's how you finish. It's not really how you start or how you were midway through, but I think how you finish I think is important.

That's how we want to finish.

Q. Did you see the games last night?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. But I think it's easier after a win. But they're engaged just like I said. I mentioned earlier about being thankful for the way they come in this room and work every day. That's how I feel. They'll be ready to go just like they are every week. But we've got to be focused, and we've got to play 60 minutes. I'll make sure that I play please, 60 minutes, please. If I've got to beg, doesn't matter what it takes.

Q. When you look at the game that Rodney had on Thursday night, I think probably if you thought it back in September that might have been a more regular occurrence. Does the philosophy at that position need to change a little bit because it seems to me you guys are always sort of looking for a guy and maybe when they don't separate it, nobody ever really gets any momentum?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, you look at Duke, they play three different tailbacks, and they've all got pretty good success running the ball. You've got to go with the hot hand. And when you have a 15-play drive, as I told the guys last night, you get to mix things up and you get to get guys going.

When you're losing the time of possession, which we still lost again, I might add, by nine minutes and 48 seconds, and we've had that discussion here the last few weeks about not winning the time of possession, but when you lose it, you don't get to run many plays, and you're running 46 plays in a game. How many reps and how many times can you establish a run game with 46 plays? And when you're down -- when you're in a ballgame, in a seven-point, three-point ballgame, you can afford to run the ball. You're not playing catch-up against a Notre Dame or whoever else it is.

Rodney is certainly capable of those types of days, but you need those guys in front of him blocking, as well, so it's a team deal.

Again, got confidence in both Rodney and C'Bo to make those explosive gains.

Q. How much does Nate's success help set that up? The second play you had, you had that play action pass up the middle, and they (indiscernible) did you see on tape that once a few of those get slowed,

maybe the aggression affects the defense?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think so. You don't see the aggression slow down, but I think anytime you can be two dimensional and you can run the ball and throw the ball and have some success doing both of those, you're obviously in control and you're not going, oh, gosh, what are we going to do now. So when you're having a little bit of success and you continue to try to bound the ball and get what you can get, whether it's three yards and just have patience with it, it can happen. But you have to have those plays, and we're still not winning the time of possession, but you have to have those plays where you're having opportunities to call more of them. We'd like to have 80 plays a game. Imagine how many carries guys would get and opportunities they'd have. That 15-play drive was one of those where we got a lot of people involved.

Q. Tackle numbers can be deceiving, but what kind of impact has Donovan had?

PAT NARDUZZI: Donovan has been really good. He's been -- I wouldn't say a surprise because that's what we thought we had, and I probably mentioned that before, but Donovan has been a big-time player for us. He makes a lot of plays. He's a guy you trust to make the tackle at that boundary position.

It's not unusual for a guy like a Brandon Hill or him to have those types of numbers. There's a lot of things based on our scheme that we're spilling to him, depending on the formation, the run concept, whether it's a counter, it's a trunk play, whatever it is, it's going to trickle down to him and he's got to be in the right spots. We've seen guys in bad spots. He puts himself in a position to make plays because of all the details he does as the ball is snapped.

Q. Seven total (indiscernible) the last two games. Was that more of a point of emphasis going into the Syracuse game?

PAT NARDUZZI: I wish I could tell you. I think I mentioned you guys asked me after the press conference. I wish I could tell you we did something different but we focus on it all the time, and some days you figure it out and some days you don't.

Still some things that amaze me when I look at the tape and I see what's called, what's not called. We won't get into that. But when you focus on it, good things happen.

Q. Is there any frustration, seeing how your team played, not a lot of penalties, didn't turn the ball over, took the ball away, ran the football --

PAT NARDUZZI: I wouldn't say frustration, but you've got to look back -- I think everybody in this room will look back after the year and say what if. What if I got it figured out earlier. That's frustrating.

Again, we say the same thing as coaches. Why couldn't we do that before. Why didn't we as coaches and players do that before. How come it took us so long to figure out that this is a recipe for success.

Yeah, you're always going to have regrets as a coach, and you're going to look back and -- you can't look back and get mad and frustrated this week, but it's like you're going to look back, and in another month we'll be looking at ourselves like why aren't we still playing. Why aren't we playing sometime at the end of December, and that'll be frustrating.

Q. What have you seen with Duke's head coach Mike Elko and how important has he been to turning around that program in such a short time?

PAT NARDUZZI: That's a great question, talking Duke. Appreciate the question. Mike Elko has done a heck of a job. What do I see? Again, Cutcliffe did a heck of a job there in the past. Offensive guru in Cutcliffe.

But the one thing I've noticed, again, their offense is no better than it was when Cut was there. Defensively they're aggressive and all that. So I don't want to talk about Xs and Os, but I think it's that first word on the board over there. If I had to say what is Mike Elko, it's attitude. I think he's gotten them to play with some grit. For whatever reason, sometimes a coaching change gets that for you. But I just see a tougher team.

When I walked off the field last year, I said, this team is different. Are they more talented? I'd say they're the same, just like everybody. But I give Mike Elko a lot of credit for the attitude and what he's done to change maybe what people think about Duke or who they're supposed to be.

I think they're tough. I think they'll get after it, and I felt that last year, that they played with an edge and a chip on their shoulder, and that's what I noticed last year coming off that field, forgetting the Xs and Os, because they've got great coaches, of course, but I felt an edge out of that football team.

Q. I heard from a lot of coaches recently that say they want the helmet communication they have in the NFL to come to college football. Where do you stand on that?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think it's a great question. I appreciate that question. No one has asked me yet. But I think it's good.

I think it would eliminate some of the signal stealing that we've had throughout the country. It's been a hot topic, that no one can see what you're saying unless they start reading lips but that's why everybody is going to go like this and they can't read my lips, either. But there's a lot of that going on. It's not just in one place. There's a lot of it going on, and it's been going on for years, so I think it would be great. They've got to find a way to use it.

To me as a defensive guy, I get scared that offenses will go even faster because they can tell the quarterback immediately what's going on. I could care less about signals. We try to just play football here at Pitt, so we don't steal signals. We're not into any of that.

I can't figure out how you'd use it on defense anyway.

But I think offensively they'll go faster, and I think offense dictates the tempo of the game. I think defensively how can I have one guy like in the NFL, one guy that's got the mic and now everybody is going to look -- who's going to tell those corners what the defense is? He can probably talk to the D-linemen, the safeties. It's hard for him to tell everybody what the defense is. It's easier for a quarterback to do that, and again, I would imagine maybe the receivers are always looking over there for the signal so they -- it will be interesting to see the postseason because I would imagine there's going to be a lot of talk about this, and I think in the bowl games they're talking about using it. I don't know how they're going to use it. There's got to be an agreement by both teams to possibly use it.

But I think a way to correct all that is let the quarterback have a mic, let the Mike linebacker have a mic, you've got a 40-second clock, you can't snap the ball until 10 seconds or 15 seconds come off the clock. It eliminates the fast tempo, and again, the Mike linebacker can get in the huddle and tell everybody what's going on. Now we know there's no stealing anything, and you can have real football the way it should be played.

To me if they did that, you can't snap the ball until 25 seconds or whatever it is, I think that would be a great way of doing it. You guys can push that in the AP, put that out there on the wire. Let's bring up a new idea.

But that's to me the only way it would really work in college football because you can't have five or six microphones -- you can't have something in everybody's helmet. I just think that's chaos. It would be nice if everybody could hear

the call. That would be great on defense. If 11 guys have to have 22 or 30 guys on offense and defense, that's a lot of mics, and I just don't think -- and someone's mic is going to go out, and I didn't get the call, time out.

But hey, huddle up. You've got 15 seconds to huddle, get your call in, make it fair, and then play ball.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

PAT NARDUZZI: You've got tempo, 15 seconds. Most people snap the ball in 16 seconds. That's a pretty fast tempo. I can give you the numbers even laying on my desk how Duke snaps the ball, even the tempo teams. It would slow down Tennessee for sure, but there's nothing wrong with that. That's when guys get hurt anyway, when they go too fast.

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