

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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## Coach Pat Narduzzi Press Conference



PAT NARDUZZI: Welcome back. It's great to have you guys here. Thanks for everything you do for Pitt football and your coverage on a daily basis and throughout the season. We appreciate it.

We're a month out from Kent, July 31. August 31 we'll be lining up and playing some ball here. We're just excited, our kids are excited. It's really not a welcome back yesterday when they came back because they've been here all summer. I think sometimes we forget that. Even as coaches we forget sometimes that they've been here working and ready for this.

They were excited today. We had a lot of enthusiasm out there. It's day one. As a head coach, day one is always -- you're out there in spiders and you don't get to see a whole lot. Never as clean as you want it to be, and I think when you look at it overall, you just love the energy and the intensity, and we'll continue to clean it up as we move forward.

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

### Q. What brings you back every year?

PAT NARDUZZI: That's a great question. I think what brings coaches back, brings me back, because that's the only one you asked about, is your love for the game. We talked about it today in our team meeting, just about the team. There's no greater sport than the game of football.

As coaches, I think we're in this game because we like to compete. You can't play anymore, so you get to coach, and to be able to bring this group together every year and produce, try to get them to gel on offense, defense, special teams and try to put the best product on the field, that's what you do it for. It's a competition. It's a challenge. It's fun. You embrace the new stuff that we have out there, whatever it is for a head coach, whether it's the house and all the different things that have happened, there's still a lot of unknowns. It's fun. This is the best time of the year.

Now, January to I guess really June, that's probably the

worst time of the year, but right now when you're talking about August, this is the best time of the year. This is what we live for.

### Q. What do you like about this team?

PAT NARDUZZI: What do I like about them? I think there's a little bit different attitude. Just talking to Stac, he's been with them more than we have as coaches. He gets more time with the players. Again, Coach Stacchiotti, that is. But there's a different attitude. I think we've learned a lot from last season. I'll say it again, I think you came out of last year and I think they thought that we would just line up and it would happen easy. I think they're hungry to play football.

Again, as hard as a coach to see it. Maybe you get a wrong break and all of a sudden it doesn't go the way you want. But I like their attitude. I like the leadership. I see more leadership out of this group, out of our seniors, out of our Eagles. It's been a really clean summer for our kids. They've done a nice job.

Again, it starts with the leadership. To me, when you've got a mature team, and again, I don't know if we have a mature team. I think we have a younger team. We have a lot of guys unknown, maybe some no-name guys out here that you don't even know who are going to be the guys at a certain position. But I know there's a lot of talent. There's more talent on this football team than we had a year ago, but it might be younger.

Last year we had some guys, the corner position, the defensive line was older. But we're younger, we're more athletic, and I just think the attitudes -- I think sometimes you've got to get smacked and knocked down before you go, oh, I've got it, and I think they got it.

### Q. This is your 10th year with the program as the head coach. What's the challenge of balancing maintaining the tone that you want as a head coach but also introducing new things and new coaches, new tones and new leadership that go with this job?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't think it's a challenge at all. Everybody buys into what we are and who we are. There's always changes in Xs and Os, whether you have a new staff or new half a staff, whatever it may be.



I think those things are always evolving every year, but to me, the challenge is to coach them, get the details out of the players, and go out and execute.

**Q. What have you seen from Nate Yarnell having this off-season, being that quarterback? I know he went to Charlotte with you. How has he fared so far?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I think he's done a nice job. He's led, and again, we're trying to get leadership from everywhere. I'd really like Nate to just focus on playing quarterback. That's the main thing.

To me the quarterback doesn't have to be the leader. He's already the leader by the position, okay. He needs to play the best football he can play. He needs to take care of his business first, and then the leading will come with that. We didn't expect Kenny Pickett to lead when he was a freshman or sophomore or a first-year starter. That will come.

But we've got a lot more guys that can lead besides just Nate Yarnell. But he's got leadership skills, there's no question about it, and he has to as the quarterback.

**Q. When you talk about specifically Gavin and Rodney, they didn't want to -- they had opportunities to leave after last year, but they both (indiscernible). Do you think them having that attitude can be like a springboard for them to take on leadership roles?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No question about it. Both of them are better leaders than they were a year ago. I think both of those guys, Gavin and Rodney, have stepped up and are doing good things out there. It's called loyalty, and I think those guys all know -- again, I think if we won eight games or nine games last year, the same is going to come -- those guys are going to be with Pitt. That's just who they are. They're loyal. Again, we've got a lot of those guys. Things happen for a reason, guys leave for a reason, it's usually either you got pushed a little bit, you get a little nudge, or you're disloyal.

**Q. Is there a different sense of urgency coming into this year for you and maybe for those senior leaders?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No question, for everybody in this room, I think even the incoming freshmen know that was not the standard. There's a different attitude, without a doubt. There's got to be -- we went through spring ball, there was a different attitude. We went through winter conditioning, there was a different attitude. They went through summer conditioning, there was a different attitude, and there has to be. There's got to be an attitude adjustment. I think that

has occurred and I think they got it.

I just see a more serious football team. Sometimes you're going, shoot, how did you not know; you can't tell. But now I can tell the difference from what we had, and you kind of now are looking for something, but you didn't really see it blending from '22 to '23 or '21 to '22 to '23.

**Q. (On players he's seen take charge.)**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, Brandon Jordan has done an outstanding job. I think he stands out as far as just taking control. I see him in text messages with the Eagles and myself, so I see that leadership there. I see Konata Mumpfield stepping up leading; I see Eli Holstein leading. Eli has done a nice job, and again, there will be competition at that quarterback position as I've said before, and I'll say it again. So Eli, he does a nice job leading and getting around all the guys and letting them know who he is.

Branson Taylor has done a nice job. Defensive line-wise, I think Nate Matlack has taken a leadership role, even though he's a new guy. Donovan McMillon, again, has stepped up and led, as well as McIntyre has done that and so has PJ O'Brien.

We've got a lot of guys that are just -- again, whether it's leading vocally or leading by example.

**Q. Donovan McMillon didn't start in the first couple games last year, but now he's had a whole season with your defense. How have you seen him kind of approach this year and what kind of expectations do you have for him?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, that's a neat story I don't think a lot of people talk about. When I asked a couple of other guys -- we've got a lot of competition going on everywhere. Donovan McMillon was in the heat of competition, with him and PJ and Javon. And I may have told this story a year ago, coming out of spring ball I had asked every DB who was the starting safety, and it was Javon McIntyre. We didn't have a second safety. I'm not telling you anything I didn't tell a lot of our players or tell our safeties, like hey, right now they don't trust you as a starter; you've got a lot of work to do.

But PJ and Javon McIntyre started and Donovan came in the second half of that Cincinnati game and took over. Sometimes you can't see it in practice, and Donovan has continued to understand the defense. I think he's got a great grasp of what we're doing right now. Last year compared to where he is now, it would be a question for him today, just where is your knowledge base. I bet you he

was coming out of camp last year probably a 5, then he went up to a 7 or 8, and I'd say he's 9 or 10 right now. He's got to feel pretty confident in what we're doing and how we're doing it, which then allows him to take that next step and start leading.

**Q. The change in turnover you've had on the coaching staff, what are some of the benefits of that happening, and how do you feel like that process is coming along?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, there's a lot of benefits. It's never easy to make those changes after you do it. You're kind of jumping up and down going, okay, I've got it. The hard part is bringing in the right people to get that done.

You look at Jake Bronowski, our special teams coordinator, it's a fresh start. I think our kids have all bought into special teams. It's exciting there.

Coach Bell, I walked out here two minutes before his staff meeting because I was watching tape with the offense and going through what they did today, and Coach Bell has done an outstanding job with the rest of the new offensive coaches on that staff.

They have a lot to prove on offense, and I know Coach Bro is excited about proving what they've got, too, and defense has got to prove that they're back.

**Q. That seems to be a slogan for you guys this year, "prove it." What are you trying to prove? What are you proving and what do you want the players to prove?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, again, it starts with the players. Our leadership council came up with "prove it," like we've got a lot to prove. Where were you a year ago? That's where you are. A lot of people are going, okay, where is Pitt, they're back where they used to be. That's not the case. So we've got a lot to prove and got to prove it by position, got to prove it by units and got to prove it as a team, so there's a lot of proving to do.

**Q. (On having player-led practices.)**

PAT NARDUZZI: That's a good question. Probably not. Some of my anxieties after practice today is they're doing it on their own. That's why they call us coaches, and they don't do it right and they don't do it like we want them to do it, and they don't do it like they do it when there's a lot of coaches standing there watching. So they need coached.

I've said this through the years, all those OTAs on their own sometimes backfire and aren't as good as you want

them to be. At least they're out there working and they're trying. That's the beautiful thing, but as far as the details go, it's got to be more detailed, but there's no way of getting that with the rules and how we're allowed to spend time with our guys.

**Q. How difficult was it for you to change your whole offensive approach, personnel and approach, and when did you decide to make that drastic move?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know. I can't tell you the last question. We'll just leave it at that. But creatures of habit, I think if you look back, our job is to score points, and when Kenny Pickett was here, we were able to use his arm and throw it because he could. He had weapons at the receiver spot and win a championship doing it.

After that, it was, okay, Kenny is gone. There was no way the next year, which was '22, that we were going to go out and throw it like Kenny was. It's just not going to happen. So we went to more of a run style. We had Izzy Abanikanda, who people didn't even know who he was, in '22.

We went to a little bit more of a run style and won nine games doing it that way.

Again, it's kind of gone back and forth a little bit. We were spreading it out when Whipple was here and throwing it all over the place, then we went to more conservative run it and that kind of thing because that's what our personnel was probably better at, and I think we're back to where we can sling it around a little bit more and spread it out.

**Q. What did Cory do to earn the assistant head coach spot?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Great question. Cory Sanders, assistant head coach, I kind of told him probably months before I was going to do it, and did it, I don't know, the end of June or whenever it was. He's very detailed on defense. He's been a head coach before. We lost Charlie Partridge, who did a great job at that role, and I wanted to have somebody in that role.

Cory is not a coordinator; he's a guy that I can trust. I think it comes down to trust. I know he's very detailed. I know he's a heck of a teacher. I know he's well respected by the rest of the football team. It comes down to respect, first of all, but he's a heck of a coach. He's done a great job developing that room, and he'll take on any roles as assistant head coach that I give him.

**Q. Does that trust involve him maybe being able to come to you, to your office, and tell you something**

## **you don't want to hear?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Always. That should happen all the time. This is no -- we're not hurting anybody's feelings. To me when you have guys on your staff that you trust, I expect that to happen, okay. I can't say that necessarily happened on offense last year. That's one of the things that kind of ticked me off is it didn't seem like there was that come in and say, hey, Coach, this is what I think, I don't think we're doing this or that. It was more like they just kind of kept to themselves.

To me, I need a guy -- I need 10 of them that are like that. I need 10 assistant head coaches that are going to come in and say, Coach, I'm just thinking that. That's what I did for Dantonio. I think that's what got me the assistant head coaching role when I was there.

But I want 10 of those guys. I don't want a bunch of yes-men. I want guys who are going to tell you what they feel, whether they're right or wrong. To me you're really good when you've got that.

I've got more than one. I know guys will come in -- it's not just those guys. I know our coordinators will come in and talk easily. I think Coach Bro will.

I like our staff a lot.

## **Q. Is there added pressure knowing how successful the other fall sports are at Pitt right now and not wanting to be the odd man out?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. Not really. I think we've set the standard winning ACC Championships at the highest level. To me when you do that and you've been to the championship game, we've already done that. You're going to always take a step backwards, and we're looking to take four or five forward.

But I think it just -- when you have success in volleyball and probably should have been in the tourney in basketball but weren't -- I don't think we've won a championship in basketball yet, but to me you want those. Our guys are looking across -- maybe our guys are going, hey, they won, we've got to win. I hope that's what they're looking at.

But I wouldn't say there's any added pressure. We've done it.

## **Q. What kind of personality do you see developing for this team?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I think this football team has got an attitude. I think they're hungry. I think they're

determined to go out and play football the way we're expected to play. We've got to stay healthy. That's going to be critical. I think that hurt us a year ago. We've got to stay healthy, keep our guys on the field, and keep that O-line healthy especially.

I shouldn't say especially, like we have to keep everybody healthy. But I know they got banged up a year ago. That hurt our production on offense a little bit.

But I see a hungry football team that's playing with a little bit chip on the shoulder.

## **Q. What are your thoughts on rosters expanding next year and the how does that change your approach to recruiting the next couple months?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Are the rosters expanding or depleting?

## **Q. I thought it was --**

PAT NARDUZZI: 95? Okay, it really could be 105, okay. But really roster sizes are going down for football. Right now we have 120 in camp. We will be down to 117 when school starts, and we try to hold that 117. I got our operations kind of monitoring how many players practice day one all the way to practice 20 in camp just to see where we are, just to see how we're going to manage the new roster number, which is 105, okay.

So next year at this time we'll have 105 guys in camp, that's it, whether they're on scholarship or whether they're walk-ons. It's all yet to be seen how we're going to manage that and do it.

I know from the top the chancellor is going to do everything she can, Chancellor Gabel, to give us what we need. She's competitive. She likes to win. Obviously Heather Lyke is doing the same thing. So we've got great leadership. There's a lot of question marks as far as how we're doing it, what we're doing, but we're going to do what's best for Pitt.

There's going to be a bunch of different ways to slice this thing up. You can look at it, there's just so many different ways to look at it. You look at 105 guys, again, we can have 105 scholarships, and we're also now able to pay the players through the athletic department as we know. Somewhere between \$20 and \$22 million will be that purse that we have. But do you pay all 105?

Right now we're paying 85 or have 85 scholarships. You can have 105 scholarships. Do you go to 95? Do you go to 100? Do you want to save some spots? Do you have some current walk-ons on your team that you want to have

them earn it? You think of Jimmy Morrissey back in the day, the Burlsworth. That award may be gone now. I don't know what's going to happen to it. It depends on how everybody decides to manage their roster.

But I can tell you this: If you have 105 scholarships after the season, you're going to have a lot more guys jumping in the portal because they're going, I am not playing here. It's just 105 is a lot.

It'll be hard to find 105 guys competitive enough to ply and do what we want need to do to win a championship here. That doesn't solve things. We need to figure it out, and I think everybody is going to have a little bit different style. Some people might say I want 97, I don't want 105. Some people might say I want as many as I can get. So we'll find out how that whole thing is going to roll, but there's a lot to think about, and I just don't really want to think about it right now; I want to coach football.

**Q. After the spring game, you said that Nate Yarnell was QB1 heading into fall camp. Is there still a quarterback competition?**

PAT NARDUZZI: There's always competition. I think I mentioned it down at media days in Charlotte last week. I'm going to continue -- I'll tell you what, Ty Dieffenbach looked good today. There's competition. I think competition makes you good.

We've got competition at every spot on the D-line. It's like, who's going to start at D-end, who's going to start at D-tackle. There's nobody given anything. You've got to come in and still earn it. You can be QB1 coming out of spring ball, but you've got to come in and earn it, and you've got to earn the trust not only of your coaches but of your teammates at every position.

At the end of the day, the players should be like, oh, yeah, he's the starter. It should be evident. If it's not, then we've got to make decisions as coaches. But to me, the players decide the depth chart.

Coming out of spring ball, to me you've got to -- hey, if we had to open up, spring game is over and we throw a depth chart up and we say, we've got to open up today, who are our guys, you've got to be able to make decisions off of spring ball, and then at the end of August, we've got to make decisions as coaches or players on who those guys are going to be. But you have to have competition.

If I told the corners that hey, there's no competition, he's the starter and you guys can go through practice every day if you want to, but you ain't going to win, I want there to be competition at every position. Nate knows that. Eli knows

that. Ty knows that. I'm going to continue to mention those guys' names because they do some nice things on the field.

**Q. With the departure of Christian Veilleux, does that open some doors or open opportunities for those guys you mentioned, and how does that change the competition?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, Christian was a talented young man, and we wish him luck as he took off. But it opens it up where we've got five scholarship quarterbacks right now, and it gives opportunities for the guys that are clearly guys that we trust to run our offense and do what we need them to do. They're going to protect the football, priority No. 1. I think turnover ratio is the number one critical thing to winning football games, and you've got to protect the ball.

We now, like Ty Dieffenbach is going to get better because he's getting more reps. If you were to throw another quarterback in the mix, saying how do you get four quarterbacks ready, it's hard. We can get three quarterbacks ready and we really have to get two really, really, really ready, and that's what we'll try to do as we go through camp, but three will get a lot of reps. Julian Dugger got reps today, and he looks much improved. It looks like he's had a great summer.

**Q. Nate and Gavin talked about how Coach Bell is expecting perfection from them. Do you see him setting the standard on the offensive side of the ball for this season?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, he'd better. He's the leader of the offense, and I said this a week ago, like Coach Bell seems like a younger Pat Narduzzi back in the day. Kind of aggressive, young, emotional, and again, just demanding excellence.

You can't be perfect. We're not going to be perfect. We're not going to be perfect. You're not going to be perfect. Nobody is perfect.

But we're demanding excellence out of our players.

The thing I love about him, it's kind of like I said, the characteristic you see out of him that I didn't know when I hired him is he is so -- you can throw a touchdown pass but he's complaining about the protection. It's not like, oh, that's great, next play. No, no. He caught a touchdown pass, but hey, look at that, that was a crappy route. We're not going to win on Saturdays with that route.

It's not just, okay, we made a play, we scored a

touchdown. It's detailed, 11 guys, taking care of all those -- those little things matter. If you just look at the outcome of a play and not look at all the bad things, it's almost like the negative guy in the room.

It's almost like back in the day as an old coordinator, everybody else was like, what a great play, and I'm the grumpy guy picking out all the other crap that was wrong in the play. And to me that's how you become great. That's what I love about what we're doing there, and even Coach Bronowski in special teams.

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