

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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## Pat Narduzzi

### Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Thanks for being here today. We close a chapter on last week's game last night. Had a good meeting. Couldn't be more proud of the guys in the room, the guys in the building, coaches, players as well, our scout team. All around it's a heck of a team win. I know it's coach cliché talking about team wins all the time, but it's a fact, it really is. It's not just coach talk.

The scout team in the back, if we don't get a good look during the week, which we think we got a pretty darn good look, it doesn't happen. Just happy with the efforts in this building.

One of the number one keys to victory that I kind of brought up to our guys during the week, on Friday night and Saturday, was just composure. Sometimes these rivalry games can get you so pumped up that you lose yourself, you don't play like you need to be. I felt like composure...

I asked them don't get too high, don't get too low. Coach always talked about that, just saw that wood. I felt like maybe we got too high at times. We did uncharacteristic stuff that I hadn't seen our guys do this season so far.

We had seven unforced errors. It wasn't good enough. Seven of 'em. Three on offense, three on defense, one on special teams. Just the tiny, fine details.

Offensively I don't think we've had a false start all year. Then all of a sudden we got three of 'em in one game. Receivers aren't set. Quarterback is snapping it before the receivers are set. Anxious I guess. Those are some things that disappointed obviously.

Of the penalties we had them offensively, almost every one of them was on a first down. I told you back in August we had our first scrimmage offensively. We had so many penalties on first down, it just kills drives. That's why the defense beat the offense in our first scrimmage in fall camp was because of those drive killers. We have to eliminate that, get back to who we are, have composure there.



Those unforced errors, at times lack of focus on different deals, whether it's playing with 10 guys on our punt return team, just some of those things we hadn't seen for the prior two games, then all of a sudden they appear in a day where there's a lot of things going on and you're excited.

We're going to be excited about this game this weekend. We move into Youngstown State week. Doug Phillips, a heck of a coach. Been doing it for a long time. Done it all over the place. Youngstown State, a playoff team a year ago. Beat Duquesne in the first round of the playoffs a year ago. Happened to get beat by Duquesne last weekend. They got beat by Villanova in the playoffs last year. Again, played Villanova in the opener this year.

We know what FCS, IAA football is. I played it, CJ Lee played it. Poppi Williams played it. We have some darn good football players in this room that are FCS players.

First thing you look at is respect. I respect every one of our opponents. I look down the roster, watch videotape, this is a good football team, again a playoff team. We're excited about the opportunity to get into this week and get game planning.

Beau Brungard is their quarterback. Starts offensively. They'll personnel you a little bit. 11 personnel, tight end and a back, three receivers. They'll be in some 12 personnel. 21 personnel, two backs, a tight end out there. They'll personnel you.

Beau's older brother was a four-year starter at Youngstown State. There's some lineage there as far as what we're going to play against.

He's athletic. He can run with the ball, he can hurt you with his feet. I think they got 19 keepers in our breakdown this year where the quarterback is just going to take it and run, they're going to block for him. He's a good player.

They got two really good tailbacks, King and Wright. One is a Cincinnati transfer that's got a lot of talent as well. They're obviously a run-heavy offense. So much that they are leading I think the country in time of possession. Shoot, they had the ball for 41 minutes last weekend against Duquesne. They're averaging having the ball for 37 minutes. We're not leading the country in time of possession. We're probably last in the country in time of



possession because we haven't had the ball. We score a lot of points when we have it. They're going to try to possess the ball, play keepaway with us. We can't start slow. We must start fast and keep the ball.

Offensive line-wise they have 125 career starts on their offensive line. They're experienced up front. They're going to maul you off the ball. If you look at 125 starts divided by five starters from left to right tackle, that means they're averaging 25 starts per guy on the offensive line.

Defensively John Haneline runs the defense. Really good football coach. Again, very similar to what we play defensively, except probably minus some of the blitzes. Going to play real sound coverage, play four down. Back to some more four down than what we've seen the last two weeks. There will be some good carryover as far as what we do every day in this program, what they're going to see.

With that I'll stop talking and let you guys ask some questions.

**Q. The nature of these two victories in the past two weeks, does that help you maintain the edge you need or is it tough to maintain edge week in, week out?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm hopefully going to create an edge. One of our DBs come up to me after our team meeting last night and said, Coach, smile, we won the game. That gives you any indication. That's the first time in 10 years I've had a player come up to me and say, Smile, we won the game. I wasn't very happy.

Again, winning is great. That's great, we won. Sang the fight song in the locker room. Let's get back to what we do. There was a lot of crap on the field that I didn't like. That's fact. That's going to create our edge starting there 'cause again, winning is everything. We can play crappy and win the football game. Did we play the way we wanted to be, the way you're supposed to be coached to do? Is that what we're asking you to do? No. We got to clean it up.

The way we won those last two games, great, found a way to win, blue vased it, but we can't get used to that. We can't wait and think we can be comfortable, we'll just win it in the fourth quarter. Doesn't matter what happens in the first, second and third. That was the conversation we had last night.

It doesn't get you till it gets you. We don't want to be sitting in the room going, I wish I would have played a better first quarter. We had those things conversation-wise. I think I answered your question, by the way.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

PAT NARDUZZI: Of course. Were you in the room? Did he tweet something last night like, Coach is grumpy (laughter)?

**Q. Your run defense. It looked like defensive tackles were getting good push. Fitting the linebackers with that push. Is there something that needs to be built sometimes it's not about pushing, it's about occupying multiple linemen or how the linebackers are pressing the line?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We want the penetration. We got to get in perfect alignments. There's times we don't have perfect alignments in the linebacker position. Sometimes we don't step properly at linebackers. Our read steps are slow. But we want penetration.

Nick James is the best at penetrating. He had a couple TFLs, at least one. He's causing havoc in the backfield. We want to attack you, penetrate you, cause havoc. Then it makes it easier on the linebacker. Clear up a lot of things for them.

We're not going to grab onto guys, hold onto them. To me, that's not our style. That's not who we want to be. That's no fun for a defense to play like that. You play in that A gap, just hold onto him, don't let the backers run through. That's not who we are, not who we want to be.

You don't get sacks that way, get TFLs. We want to be attacking, aggressive, but play with good techniques as well. That's not done all the time in there. We'll continue to get better.

Again, got a lot of young guys. We got different guys in there this year. We had three old men last year. We got three young guys, four young guys, five young guys that have played some football in there. They'll just continue to get better. We'll be okay.

Again, they average a little under four yards per carry, by average. Again, I'm talking per carry. Probably the biggest problem we had was with the draw last week, which we won't have that problem again. Again, it's D tackles rushing their business. We had some twist games on, rushing it, opening up the A gaps. They're making it worse. It's details.

Really it's a pass game run that got us the most. Again, I think when you look at it defensively, we gave up four explosives. Our goal is four or less. Only four big plays in the game. Offensively we had 10. That's our goal. We gave up four on defense. We met both of our goals as far as explosives, which one of our other keys of victory was

win the explosive plays, and we did that.

**Q. What do you think you've learned about your team so far?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Probably the same thing you have. I've learned that they're going to find a way to get it done. Character-wise, I think there's a major care factor in here. I think this football team has goals and aspirations of what we want to do.

I told them last night, Everything you want to do is right there. You are sitting right now going into game four, trying to be 1-0 this week, it's right there in the palm of your hand. What are you going to do? Stay in the same routine you did last week this week? All those little things.

It's one week at a time. We're in a one-game season. I find that they're serious about it. There's not a laissez faire kind of attitude at all. They're locked in. We'll find out. They got to be locked in every single week.

**Q. (Question about pass protection.)**

PAT NARDUZZI: More physical right now from what I saw the other day. Again, giving up five sacks, not happy. Coach Darveau is not happy. Coach Bell is not happy. I think I told you Coach Bell was upset after the game. He couldn't smile. I loved that. I didn't smile last night, he's not smiling. Nobody's satisfied. I think that's really where we are right now.

The pass protection is not good. They got good players and all that. We didn't play well up front. Again, you win the game, you don't play well up front. The other key to victory, the other key to victory was we got to win up front. Offensive line-wise we did not win up front like we needed to. That will get corrected.

Again, I love winning when you don't win up front. It's nice to win and not play your best.

**Q. You played wide receiver in the past. Given your history with the school, your dad coaching there, you playing there, does this game hold any major significance for you?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No doubt. There's no question about it. It's significant for me. But I'm not playing the game. I get to stand on the sideline with a hat on in coaching shoes. I don't play the game.

Certainly it's one of those games. I grew up there. I grew up in Youngstown. I was a ball boy this big. I got video for you. Ball boy this big. That's how I grew up right there.

We can talk about third grade I think is when we moved there. That was in my blood. That's kind of why I'm a coach. Dad was your hero. I mean, yeah, it's significant.

**Q. Last week I think Kade talked about needing to trust the receivers more, trust the game plan more. You talked about it after the game on Saturday. It seems like he's holding onto the ball a little bit. Is that leading to some of those sacks? Does he need to develop that trust in the receivers?**

PAT NARDUZZI: A little bit. Again, I think he trusts them. It's one thing to say I trust you, Chris, but you seen the guy run downfield. It's making that throw. A couple times, if he trusts, throws it out there. It's hard.

Did he trust Daejon Reynolds on that pass? Must have. Three guys there. He threw it up there. To me that's a trust play. Trusted Daejon to make that play. He threw it up there. Doesn't do that all the time. Sometimes that's good, sometimes that's bad. Sometimes it can cause you to get sacked. Sometimes you don't get the explosive play you want.

I tell you this, one of the other keys to victory was protect the football. We were plus two coming out of there, plus a blocked punt, a touchdown. You can count that as three turnovers. Interception for touchdown on third down. E.J. and the sports information don't count it as another turnover. That's a turnover for a touchdown. We're really plus three in the turnovers.

Sometimes that trust can get you into trouble. I thought you were going to be there. The other guy made the catch. Be careful what you wish for.

It's one of those, protect the football. That's primary number one. The rest will come. He's game three in going on number four.

**Q. You talked about the composure of the team. What does it say about Eli that he was able to be so composed? 19 years old, three games in his collegiate career.**

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, two out of three come from behind. Tells you a lot about him. He's going to make those plays and he's going to trust it when he needs to trust it.

Fourth quarter, going back to Chris' question, he trusted in the fourth quarter when he had no choice but to trust, right? He was being careful with the ball in the first three quarters.

That will come with time that he trusts it. Eli has shown a lot of poise in the pocket and a lot of composure on the sideline. We like where he is.

**Q. Was it an easy throw to make? Another guy open?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Was it an easy throw? I don't remember. I was watching the one guy. A drag route on the backside that was wide open underneath. Three by one. I forget. I just know the backside we had a drag wide open that we could have checked it down to, he would have run for 20. But he threw it to the right guy.

Again, you think about where he threw it, when he threw it, just the time. Running out of time of possessions, time to get another possession with the football. So to me, we could have scored on that drive. I think we would have scored on that drive, but it was going to be that quick if we threw it underneath. Timing is everything.

**Q. Kyle Lewis, Rasheem Biles are putting up a lot of numbers. How are they down to down, snap to snap in consistency?**

PAT NARDUZZI: They're pretty good. A play here and there, you're reading your keys, sometimes keys lie to you. It's a muddy key as far as what they do.

Those two guys are play-makers. Seems like every week there's a fight to say who is the best one out of those two right now 'cause they are playing at a high level. Again, they're different than what we had a year ago at that outside backer spot. They're making more plays, they're aggressive. They pull the trigger. They don't hesitate.

To me, one of the keys I learned as a young linebacker, you can't hesitate in this game. You hesitate, you make no plays, you sit in the middle doing nothing. Those two pull the trigger, are explosive. They're play-makers.

**Q. You said last week you don't want to rotate some of the guys on defense. I don't think Donovan came off the field at all. Kyle one play after he went down. Rasheem played about 80% of the snaps. How important has having those three been when you're not getting the stop up front, on the secondary?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Again, we count Donovan depending on the formation as a run fitter. He's a run fitter because he's in the box. Four D-linemen aren't going to make the play every time, to your point. Those guys, that's why they're in there. That's why they're not coming out. They're the fixers, okay?

Chris asked earlier. The D-line attacks the line of

scrimmage, being aggressive up front. Those backers' job is to fix the hole, find the hole, okay? Linebackers do no different. Donovan doesn't treat it any different than the linebackers do. Their job is to find the hole. Holes will be created. You want the offensive line to turn around, look, see where that D tackle went. They're the fixers. You need guys that will find those holes.

The linebackers' job, safeties' job is no different than a tailback job except the tailback has the ball in his hand. We're trying to find that hole, hit it. Some people think it looks like a blitz at times. It's just them reading their keys fast, playing fast.

**Q. The run defense, you are looking at how can we fit our linebackers in the holes, see those holes?**

PAT NARDUZZI: And efficiently get there. It's efficiency. You watch sometimes, sounds like you're watching a lot of videotape, these linebackers are doing this. You take a false step... You have to be stepping with the right foot and gaining ground, all those fine little details. Then you got to blitz the right hole when you got to blitz. Don't blitz the wrong hole. There's A gaps and B gaps and C gaps. You better hit the right run.

**Q. Seems like there's always a different player making a big play these past two wins. What does that mean?**

PAT NARDUZZI: That's what good football teams do. If you only have one guy you can throw it to, you only have one linebacker that can make a play, they're going to run the other way and double cover that receiver.

It's called personnel, doing a pretty good job recruiting, getting the right guys in the program. I think I mentioned this last fall or December, January, with our recruiting class, that I think we made our roster better. Whether it's through high school recruiting or through the transfer portal, you have some guys leaving, you have some guys come in. Overall we made the thing better than what it was.

**Q. What do you think of the student section support on Saturday?**

PAT NARDUZZI: The Panther Pit was outstanding. Again, I don't peek up there very often. I gave some high fives at the end there with some of the folks down there in the end zone. They were outstanding. Need 'em again this weekend. Appreciate you asking.

Again, the game is no fun without the fans. The game's no fun without a rowdy student section that we have. I think it's one of the best in the country. When you look at the

population of what we have, 16,000 students at the University of Pittsburgh, to see that many show up there. That's a lot. There's places that have 75,000 students, period, 60,000 students. We don't have that population. You look at the percentage of our Panther Pit that shows up, is there, stayed till the end, it's helping our football team win. It's incredible.

I'll go back and say it. We all experienced football with nobody in the stands, okay? COVID, that was awful. I think it was hard to have any energy as a football player, as a coach. Kind of like, This is awful. You're sitting there looking around at empty seats.

But to have our fans there like they are... We have homecoming this weekend. Youngstown coming in. Should be another nice event to attend.

**Q. You mentioned the big plays from different players. In the third quarter offensively, negative two yards (indiscernible). How big was that play in general?**

PAT NARDUZZI: That was big. It was even bigger after they faked the punt with 10 guys on the field. The guy that's supposed to secure the punt, makes sure he punts it, would have been off that edge. Even bigger after that. Usually after a faked punt like that, the momentum change, you're going to give up points.

Went the other way.

**Q. How does that happen?**

PAT NARDUZZI: What's what?

**Q. There's chaos on the sideline. How does that happen?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Chaos on the sideline, lack of focus, yeah. We straightened that up last night, too. I told everybody, If you're not on that next special teams...

We have alerts. Punt alert. Everybody gets up. Third down, punt alert, I'm flipping offense, defense. Make adjustments. Maybe they were just staring at the iPad, right? Like they're staring at their phones, let me see that play again, let me see what that D tackle did. Whatever it may be. It's focus. Part of the focus. The details that drive you nuts as a coach.

It's great to learn about it, let it happen in that game. If that had cost us the football game, we'd all be sick. I might be throwing up right now because it would make me sick if that was what caused us to lose that football game.

But guys made played. Maverick had a heck of a block, cleaned it up. Again, it's a learning experience. Our guys have to learn from those mistakes.

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