

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Coach Pat Narduzzi Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Had a good weekend. I think kids played their tails off. I couldn't be more proud of the way our guys play with effort. Like, we emphasize it all the time but our kids play hard for four quarters.

As you guys know, they never give up, from first year to tenth year they are going to give you everything they've got. That's what I love about them.

Wins are hard, and wins on the road are even harder. My hat goes off to them.

I think North Carolina is a good football team. If they keep their heads up they'll win a lot of football games.

Some of the things that kind of stood out to me, again, there's always the good and the bad. There's the bad obviously is what we focus on as coaches unfortunately.

But some of the good was they only had four explosive gains. To me anytime we hold someone four or less explosive gains, we're 70 percent win. We've got a 70 percent chance of winning. And we held them to four and I think that's two weeks in a row. Maybe three weeks in a row that we've done that.

But anytime you can hold people, and again of the four they got, we kind of gave it to them because we had some mental errors on the plays. It's not coming down to physical where we physically, man, they had a great play -- we physically just couldn't handle it.

There's some mental stuff we've got to straighten out and get right, either take away the ability to be able to do some of the things we're doing or get them to do it the right way.

And offensively we had nine. Again our goal was to get nine or more. We got nine. Again, we're 70 percent win when we have nine explosive plays. Those are the good things.

I think the other thing you look at is doesn't matter what happens on first down or second down, what happens on



money down. We emphasize that. I thought it was a key we talked about one of the key victories, was winning money down. Doesn't matter what happens on first and second down, but money down you better win.

You look at the numbers we're way, way above the average. We have some lofty goals, I forget offensively and defensively what they are. I want to say defensively we want to be 70 percent win on third down-and-three-plus. I think we were 70 percent win. Again, money down now includes with as many fourth downs as you're seeing as third down and fourth down.

Just winning the fourth down, and again our guys did an exceptional job. Mentioned it postgame, just the success we won four out of six short yardage fourth down calls, or at least fourth down, whether short yards or not. Most of them were. I know the last one wasn't.

But to me that's like what it comes down to. You better make a play on fourth down -- offensively stay on the field or defensively to get off the field. And again offensively and defensively we both won that.

Those are some of the highlights. And obviously I'll stay away from all the negatives. But execution comes down to one -- it's all about execution.

Cal, another talented football team we get to play. Justin Wilcox, great coach. Defensive-minded head coach, team plays with an attitude and toughness. You can see that on the video.

The thing that comes to mind when I look at the Cal football team, first tile getting them here into Pittsburgh is speed. I think they've got a ton of speed. When I think of their speed, I think of their running backs, their backs overall. Their running backs and quarterbacks are talented.

Running backs -- is exceptional. The next kid, No. 25, is I think his nickname is Jet, I got his nickname down. The Thomas kid is fast as well.

And I look at their defensive backs and linebackers, just their skill guys are maybe as good of skill guys we've seen this year so far. That will be a challenge for us.



They're third in the country in turnover margin. And third in the country, they're being opportunistic on defensive. They're making a lot of plays on defense. They have 14 interceptions the year. They're making plays. They got great ball skills on the back end as well. The linebackers got a few of those as well. Really good football team that has been tested.

You look at who they played -- Auburn, Florida State and Miami their last three games. So whoever did their scheduling didn't do them any favors, I guess. They got three really good teams in a row, and hopefully going on number four here with Pitt.

Q. 29 (inaudible) on Saturday. (Indiscernible). Do you guys have to do a better job distributing the football around and not wearing down as much in football games?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's not like we're trying to get them 11 catches. It's in two-minute, and he gets two or three catches right there in a row. Again, I think it comes down to just being smart with the football.

Eli can take some shots and throw it down the field and distribute it more. But at the end of the day I want the ball completed. Put it in our players' hands. Again Daniel Carter can do the same thing. We've seen Chuck do the same thing. Obviously Rodney can do the same thing.

So I think we're not worried about who gets it. It's about what's the smart play. It's like, we'd like to get the ball to Gavin. Gavin is probably the most unlucky tight end in the country. When you watch some of the plays where he's open, we have chances to get him the ball and we haven't had a chance to get it to him. But he's open. And we have some nice plays called.

But that sometimes happens. We'd like to get Gavin more. We're trying to but for whatever reason it just doesn't work out that way.

So distribution of the ball is critical. We'd like to spread it out. I think we've had a lot of guys catch balls this year so far.

But, hey, there's a lot going on -- pass rush, blitzes, whatever it may be. You can't predetermine I've got to get him some catches so throw it over that way.

That's when you make mistakes. And I think that's the great thing about what we're doing right now is protection of the ball. We had that one awful, awful play.

Q. Fourth downs (inaudible). Maybe you can

(inaudible) for your offense, better score (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: Maybe a little bit of both. Maybe it's respect for the offense. Again, just he's going by analytics just like everybody else in the country is doing is using the analytics and saying, okay, you've got a 55 percent chance of making the field goal here but you've got 55 percent chance of converting on fourth-and-one. Let's go. Let's put the game away.

Mack Brown made good decisions. Everything he made decision-wise, again, I would have done the same thing he did. You've got to go for it on fourth down. You take chances. Early in the game we had a fourth down and we converted it -- I think on the first drive, I believe. Led to a field goal.

You have to take those chances when you have those opportunities. Fourth-and-one, back 25 years ago, back when I was playing, nobody went for it on fourth-and-one. Even in your own territory, people are going for it more and more every year because of the odds of getting it and sophistication of offensive plays.

I think that's where you're going. And Mack Brown is a heck of a coach. I made good decisions. I would make all the same decisions he did. But didn't have as many opportunities to do it.

I think we were 2-for-2 on fourth down. Correct me if I'm wrong. But guys have to make plays too.

Q. [Question about 200 different yard rushers], defensive guys. How does it make it difficult for opposing defenses to game plan when it's not just about subbing one or two guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's a lot harder, to Chris' point, spreading it out. We're trying to spread it out as much as we can. We'd like to have another couple this week depending on who you're getting the ball to. But it all depends on what they're doing.

It's not that we're just throwing the ball to "that guy." They've got to worry about everybody. That's what makes it so hard with Desmond in the backfield because he's a running back but he's also a receiver. It's not like he's a good receiver and an average running back. The guy can make plays when he gets the ball handed off.

Again, we call it 11-personnel that we're in most of the time -- one tight end and three wide receivers and a running back. But really you could look at it and say, it's four receivers in a game but a running back in the game. He's a slash type guy that can do it all.

He's a receiver and he's a running back, and he's deadly at both. That's what makes him so exceptional.

Q. 130 FBS schools did not realize that Des was a big-time, including this one, did not realize Des was a big-time college football player.

PAT NARDUZZI: There's a bunch at the FCS level. There really is. Again, you're looking for guys that are bigger than this podium and normally if you can't see them, you're like, hey, where are you over there.

Again, comes down to size. There's so many good players out there. That's why I said, everybody gets concerned about all these five-star guys. It's not about the five-star guys. It's about those guys that can play, whether it's a two-star, three-star guy, I think it all comes down to, Chris Peak can tell you, it comes down to evaluating what you like.

When we watch the tape, he's explosive. You can look at the size and all that. We've had little guys through the years be good players.

But there's just so many players out there. If you've got a choice between a 5'8" guy and 6-foot guy, you'll take the 6-foot guy and it trickles down.

That's the great thing about the portal for FCS teams is you go and prove what you have and move up and do great things. Either way you have the chance to go to the NFL. But to be able to prove it at a higher level, he's getting that opportunity and he's following through with it.

Q. On your final drive, I was curious, (indiscernible) takes more than seven minutes off the clock get points that were successful. There's still a number of snaps, snapped the ball at 31 seconds left, 27. Was Eli still staying with tempo he was comfortable with? Should he have run the clock even more on some of those plays there?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, you know, we've had a conversation as offense, just running the clock out, maybe they don't get into a two-minute. Maybe the game's over and we don't have to run the snap, make them use their timeouts, all those things.

Again, as a head coach, I've got a hard time handcuffing -- I have a hard time handcuffing an offensive coordinator and saying do this, just run the ball clock out and be conservative. You all would sit in here and whine and complain. I don't want to be that guy.

I was at a game one time, we got beat 12-10 -- I tell the staff the story -- we got beat 12-10 to Michigan in the Big House. We're up 10 to -- 12-10, I think we got beat. They kicked four field goals.

But we're up 10-9 and our offense got the ball in a coming-out situation, probably inside the 10. They ran three straight plays right up the middle when there's guys playing 10 yards off, we could have thrown a quick route out there -- just get one first down and the game is over.

We go three-and-out and we punt the ball. Michigan doesn't get a first down and they kick a field goal to win the game.

So it's that being conservative. What got you where you are is the way I look at it. And the thing -- so I don't care if they run or pass. I want to continue to be aggressive. You look at the videotapes, they're all in the box, okay. And Coach Bell is, we're going to score a touchdown here. I'm like, that's great. I like guys who want to score touchdowns. Go ahead. I'm not going to say, run it up the middle for a 1-yard loss. What's better? Scoring touchdowns.

The thing we have to do a better job at in that situation, whether you run it or pass it or clock, number one is we've got to make sure we kick a field goal. We've got a great field goal kicker.

If we didn't have a great field goal kicker, I would say let's get in the end zone; I don't trust that guy -- I don't want to kick a field goal in that situation but let's take our shots.

If we did a good job protecting -- we've got Gavin wide open in the end zone but we didn't protect the quarterback because we blocked the wrong guy.

So there's those situations. So we can score -- we're up 14 and they need two touchdowns. But the emphasis is not on what we did run/pass, it's about executing at the end of the game the right way, whether it's blocking the guy, then the quarterback being smart with the football at the end of the game knowing, hey, we've got a field goal already, do not throw the ball where even anybody in North Carolina has a chance to touch the ball. That's what we don't want to have. If in doubt, throw it out of the end zone and we're okay.

But we've got to be smarter there. And it's rookie mistakes there. I told Coach Bell, and the last two plays we get our quarterback hit. I don't want him hit either.

Those are the things I was disappointed in the last series. But as far as play calling, I want to go get them. I want to

be aggressive and I don't want to handcuff a coordinator where he's stuck running the ball up there and everybody's going what are we doing here.

Q. What about Eli (inaudible) you're undefeated, scored three touchdowns, touchdown (inaudible) every conference you had. But talking about stakes like that, the distribution of the football, how do you feel you've done and what do you feel is the next step for the group?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's done a remarkable job. Redshirt freshman playing his first season. He's done an unbelievable job. Those are things we still have to work on, understanding the situation that. Hey, it's like I told Coach Bates, our staff, Coach Bates, you feel better with a 10-point lead going into two minute or seven-point lead?

As a defensive coordinator, you want that 10 points. If they score, we're okay. Everybody is a little bit looser on defense, lets us go, as opposed to playing tight like we can't give them anything. Hey, they can get a couple of yards. Doesn't matter. They ain't scoring twice -- they ain't scoring twice in a minute 33 or whatever was on the clock.

Q. D.J. game notes, there's a number next to your team's name for the first time in a while. Is that something that comes up in meetings, or do you tell kids to ignore it?

PAT NARDUZZI: Ignore it. Didn't talk about it last night at all. But Tuesday just talk about like, hey, refocus; doesn't matter what we've done in the past. That's just the name of the game. That's what I've done forever. And I don't care the ranking. I don't care the preseason ranking. The only ranking we'll brag about is what our postseason ranking is and trying to win a championship. Those are the rankings you worry about.

Right now, midseason, if you get too caught up, look at us, we're ranked, good luck to you.

Q. That being said, what do you like about your team five games in, what have you learned about them that maybe you didn't know on August 31st?

PAT NARDUZZI: Resiliency, I guess. Toughness. Like just the whole -- the character thing. The other thing I talked about, I always talk a lot about those four words up there, attitude, effort, toughness and knowledge, but their attitude. I love their attitude.

There's not a selfish bone on our football team, at least haven't shown it yet. I like their attitude. I like their selflessness that they've shown. Doesn't matter who

catches the ball, who has the big game as a receiver, who makes a sack. They're celebrating together.

There's no whining afterwards, well, I didn't get my chance. You're celebrating in the locker room. You have someone sitting in the locker room -- I've seen it before. You have someone in the locker room sitting by themselves, I didn't get to play, I didn't get to make a play, whatever it is. I don't see that.

That's what I've learned. This team is selfless. They're worried about the we, we and not the me, me, what's good for me, which we continue to preach. You just enjoy coaching this football team.

Q. Are those the reasons why teams make plays at the end of games and some teams don't? You guys have had comebacks, made plays when you needed to on the road and at home? Is that what (inaudible) or is there more to it or are those the things that make --

PAT NARDUZZI: I think that could be the point because at the end of the game you don't know who is going to make it.

We didn't sack the quarterback all day. Then Kyle Louis comes up and makes a sack. It's about time we got one. It's not all about sacks, but you get them when you need to.

But I think that can happen anywhere. It's not like you're running a route knowing that he's never going to throw me the ball, I'm going to go run this post route or this fade route and he ain't going to throw it to me. Everybody's got a chance. Just run it and see what happens.

I think that's what it comes down to. Daejon Reynolds, for example. That deep ball he caught, that 40-yard touchdown, that was the first catch of the year. He didn't run that route like he wasn't going to get the ball. He wasn't necessarily the primary target on that one but he became the primary target, covered by three guys, catches the ball.

Just that selflessness and him running that route like, I'm going to get the ball thrown to me every time. And blocking his tail off.

Look at some of the effort. I pointed out Daejon, just he had a couple of blocks out there, just pummeling people and putting them in the ground, pancake blocks for receivers. Those are some big blocks Gavin Bartholomew, regardless what he has, 11 yards receiving.

Like on one of Eli's runs down the sideline, their sideline, he takes a guy, he's blocking them for 10 seconds and

drills him to the ground. Talk about effort. He's not worried about his catches, he's worried about winning and doing his job and just playing with an attitude and some great effort. You saw that, Chris, huh? You liked that block. I saw you shake your head.

Q. You had a strong incentive to a starter on the depth chart. What did you like about him and with six starting defensive tackles (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: We're going to run 60 tackles -- it's like by committee. I hope we don't put 60 tackles out there. Linebackers would not be happy.

But it's every week we're going to start the guys that have the best week of practice. Fitz, he had the best week of practice. Francis Brewu did some great things as well. He only had nine plays. Maybe we should have got him more. As a coach you're trying to get as many in there as you can, see what they've got.

But there's some -- Gose (phonetic), he's a screen killer. I think first screen they ran, which screen was a major emphasis last week. He turns and goes. He sniffs it. He feels it, makes a great tackle on a screen that's out there in the flats.

We're just going to utilize him as we go, but Sean FitzSimmons, first game back, he's usually a slow guy getting back off an injury, but we didn't know what we get out of him. We wanted to limit his plays.

I think he had 40-plus snaps. We were thinking about limiting going in, not overdo it, but it was hard to not put him on the field.

We saw a lot of good stuff out of those guys up there when we were going the right way. There were times we were going the wrong way. It wasn't necessarily their fault. I blame the coaches for it, number one, then our players, communication issues. But Sean did a nice job and so did those other guys.

Q. Were you concerned about the lack of sacks?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, not really. That's a great question. Last week doing self-scout, you love that self-scout stuff. I want to say two-thirds -- at least 40 percent of our third down -- we're going to get sacks when they're definitely throwing the ball. Third down we're seeing a tremendous amount of screens, more than I've ever seen in my life. People just throwing screens.

Quarterback screen, just throwing it out there. Like people are getting the ball out of their hands because they don't

want to give up sacks. We can all get worried about sacks.

Last week the emphasis was not getting sacks; it was to kill the screens to make sure we took their screens away because their screens are so good and deadly.

We knew going into this game, shoot, it's on third down, we're seeing that many screens coming into the game now we're facing the best screen team we face, we're going to see more.

That's why it's important when Gose (phonetic) got that first screen, it was, oh, we got him. We sniffed out screens. Jimmy Scott takes care of a screen, rushes up the field, feels it.

He covers the tight end screen and then they throw it to a receiver down the field on the screen. There's linemen down the field. You can't really throw it down the field when there's screens and the linemen are running down the field. I've never seen that done before ever.

It's because we sniffed out the screen. They threw it down the field. It's one of those plays. It's like, how do you stop that one? You can't.

So I'm not concerned about the sacks. If you looked at drop-back pass per sack, that's what I would worry about. But I haven't looked at that stat. It's getting a win and stopping them and finding a way to get it done. I do love sacks. But you know what, more important than the sacks probably is the amount of hits you're going to get on a quarterback.

If you hit quarterbacks, we've hit some quarterbacks. I like touchdowns. I like strip-sack touchdowns. The one we got, when we were an inch away from having another sack, strip sack and Nahkai Johnson is running to the end zone for a touchdown. So we're hitting the quarterback. The quarterback is sitting back there in a clean pocket, not good.

Q. Flip side, no sacks allowed, the offense (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: They held a couple times. That helps. Okay. The first holding call was just okay. But the other ones, Baer saved the quarterback one time, which is a good thing.

I think two of the three were good calls and warranted in a big way. But, hey, protect the quarterback at all costs. And our guys, our offensive line, did that. But he got hit. I don't want him getting hit either. That's the thing.

We didn't give up any sacks, but as I mentioned to Chris earlier, the last two plays of the game, he's in there, he got hit both times. We don't want that to happen.

Q. Jaydn Ott has been a threat. You talked about his offense, what you guys have as competitors this speed (inaudible), what he brings?

PAT NARDUZZI: ... (audio cuts out) ... the edge, facing another one this week. Ott's a good football player. Didn't start out, had a nagging injury, whatever it was. I'm not their trainer, but he's come back and he's talented. He can catch the ball in the backfield.

He kind of reminds you a little bit of a Des Reid. He has the ability to do it all. If you give him a lane, he can take it to the house at any time. So can the Thomas kid, the Jet kid there.

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