

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: All right. I hope everybody's doing well. As we all saw the news this morning and, again, I find out this morning of the hiring of Allen Greene as our new athletic director.

I don't know where to start. I can just tell you this. I'm really excited about that hire. I, again, had nothing to do with it. Just focusing on coaching football, and obviously wasn't on the search committee, nor did I have time to be on that.

But I'll start off by saying, first of all, I thank Chancellor Gabel for doing such a great job on this thing. I think Allen is a slam dunk hire. I don't think you could have gotten anybody in the world better, and I say that for a couple reasons. I think it starts with people. And probably 2017, maybe 2018, I think probably 2017, I was out in Arizona with my son at a Fiesta Frolic, you know, kind of coaches and meetings and all that kind of stuff out there, and I had an opportunity -- I got paired up. I didn't ask to get paired up, but things happen for a reason. I got paired up to play with Allen Greene at a beautiful golf course out in Arizona and obviously spent the day with him. And had kind of stayed in touch the entire time. And as a matter of fact, when he got that Auburn job, I texted him -- when he was at Buffalo -- texted him, hey, congrats, happy for you. You're going to do a great job down there, all those things.

He was a guy that I wanted to stay in touch with. It was kind of like this guy is top notch. And it starts with the people. You know, I haven't watched how he ran an athletic department. I'm not worried about that. The chancellor took care of that. But as far as people and wanting to work with somebody, the chancellor did an unbelievable job of nailing that hire, which is significant.

So I thank her, and, again, I'm excited to work with Allen. Talked to him this morning as well, congratulated him and his family. He is pumped up to be here. I guess you'll get a feel next week, and we'll get a chance to sit down next week, him and I. But he's excited. And that's about all I got to say there.



On to football business, which seems like my press conferences, whether it's a Monday or Friday, I get tied in with some big news that I got an opportunity to come speak to you about. But the main reason you're here, besides that exciting news of new leadership there, is for Syracuse. And I feel like we're playing Syracuse for the first time, because it's a brand new staff.

Obviously first time playing him, Fran Brown, new head coach there. He's done an unbelievable job in such a short time. Obviously his pedigree, his coaching tree, going from Matt Rhule, he's been with Kirby Smart, Will Muschamp. He's been around some tremendous coaches at some of the highest level of football as well.

So he's done an incredible job. He's got ten transfers on defense, six on offense. The Fadil Diggs kid, defensive end, is phenomenal, the guy you better know where he is every snap and they move him around. And then, obviously, that one transfer quarterback, that Kyle McCord, is a tremendous football player. If you're not a Pitt fan, if you're not a Syracuse fan, but you're a quarterback fan, you should get your tickets now because that guy is going to play in the National Football League.

We watched him on third down the other day. I don't know if he throws an incomplete pass, especially on third and medium. He throws darts. He's accurate. He's smart. He knows where to go with the ball. He will be the best quarterback that's walked in to play us in this stadium in a while. So we got a great chore ahead for us to defend him and a slew of really good receivers.

Like I said, they've got some transfers in that are phenomenal players. One of his favorite targets is a Georgia transfer that Fran Brown obviously had a relationship, maybe recruited him, I don't know the insides, from Georgia, got him to come with him to Syracuse.

So he's transformed that football team. I think they're elite. And he's got Jeff Nixon, offensive coordinator, came from pedigree of NFL teams, but was with the Carolina Panthers last. He worked with Baylor. And, again, he's coached, I don't know, 15 years in the National Football League, and the offense looks like a pro-style offense. He's got great personnel on offense.

And then Elijah Robinson is their D coordinator, who Fran



grew up with in Camden, he's been his guy, came from Texas A&M.

So it's a whole new deal up there, and happy for Fran. He's done a tremendous job, and it's going to be a big battle between a 6 and 0 and a 5 and 1 football team Thursday night. So get your tickets. Jerry, you going to be there/ okay. Let's go. Questions.

Q. You mentioned transfers. Almost half the schools in the ACC have a transfer quarterback.

PAT NARDUZZI: How about the SEC?

Q. Talking about the ACC.

PAT NARDUZZI: Do your homework now.

Q. There's transfer quarterbacks everywhere.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah.

Q. Specifically in the ACC. Maybe half the schools in the ACC have a transfer quarterback. What is it about the conference that attracts these guys and have they changed the landscape of the ACC?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. You know, we can go back to Nathan Peterman. We've had -- I think the transfer quarterback has been happening for a while. As a matter of fact, I think there's a stat out there that 66 percent of high school quarterbacks transfer. That's crazy. I mean, I don't know if you heard that one. But 66 percent.

I would say it's about the same in every conference that guys are flipping. I think the cohesion between a quarterback and his offensive coordinator slash quarterback coach is critical. If you're not feeling it, they just take off and they find that marriage. It's kind of like if you're not feeling it in a marriage, you go find another one. And I think it's the same thing for quarterbacks. I mean, especially in this day and age.

You want to find that -- you want to get that guy that believes in you that you can turn him into gold. And I think that's obviously what happened with Eli. To me that's what's happened with McCord, if obviously he wasn't good enough to play at Ohio State or whatever. I don't know what those issues are. But he's phenomenal.

So you find that right fit for you, and -- but quarterbacks around the country transfer. I would imagine if you went and searched the SEC and the BIG TEN, you're going to see the same thing happening.

I just saw someone's quarterback is out this week and Jeff Sims. I'm like, Jeff Sims, how do I know that name? And I was like, oh, like Nebraska, Georgia Tech, and like, he's on his third school. I'm like, I knew I knew that name. I had to do a little research to find out. So it's happening everywhere.

But the ACC is the conference of quarterbacks, right? So maybe that's the reason. I truly believe since I've gotten here, the quarterbacks that we've played against and the quarterbacks that are in the NFL from the ACC is better than any conference, period. And so if I'm a quarterback at a different conference, I want to come to the ACC. So maybe our percentage is higher, I don't know.

Q. Allen Greene has (indiscernible). NIL. How important do you think that is given the current landscape?

PAT NARDUZZI: That's a great question. I think everything is important, right? If that's all he's got, we got problems. I think he's the whole package, Amanda. I think he's got it all, but certainly that was something the chancellor -- and, again, it's a great question for the chancellor probably more than me, but I think everything is important. You can't just have a guy or gal that just does one thing, hey, I'm good at this, but I'll manage these. I think he's a superstar. I think he's a superstar, because he's a great person. He's got a personality. He's going to go out and help us raise money. Whether that's for, you know, the University of Pittsburgh athletic department or if it's for NIL and for our collective, I think he can do it all.

Q. As far as Kade and Eli this past week, what were some of the things they focused on? What did you hear from them? What did you see them really kind of going after that Cal game?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. It was one of those games. First thing I'll give you is give Cal credit, but I think just sometimes there's a player -- you know, again, it goes back, let's start with the coach of feeling uneasy about what happened on the left side of your offensive line and kind of getting a little cautious. That's probably one of them. And then just being over anxious to go make a play, you know. I think you're playing a good football team, you just gotta be careful.

So, again, it's a learning lesson. Let me tell you, like walking out of that game with a win and not playing very good on offense, what's better than that, right? I mean, there's nothing better than that. You know, just sat in a receiver-quarterback meeting last week, whatever day that was, just listening to them get coached up. We learned a lot of things from that game, and our players learned a lot.

You gotta learn from your mistakes, but there's no lost trust in Eli. I think he's spectacular. I think he's going to bounce back. But sometimes when you try too hard, that's a problem. But he's going to be fine.

Q. Did he run around enough in that game?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I don't know. Maybe that's a great question for him, Jerry. Did he run around enough? Could he run around enough? I mean I think they did a good job of containing the pocket. Every quarterback -- every defense is going to do it a little bit different. Are they just going to get you, or are they going to try to capture you as we've talked maybe in the past? But they did a nice job of kind of just sealing and pushing the pocket and condensing things.

If an offense -- if a quarterback sees this big ol' hole as wide as this aisle here, it invites you to take that, but when the seams are smaller and you're kind of going, if I try to sneak through there, is that guy going to stick his arms out, grab me by the facemask or the shoulder and pull me down and it's a bad scramble.

So you gotta feel those lanes, and if you got the right ratios, it's harder to get out, and I think they did a good job of keeping him in there and making him have to throw it out of there. And they did a good job on the back end, and again, we'll learn from it. I think it was a great learning game, and we got the win at the same time.

Q. You guys were able to get to the quarterback a lot this past week. Just kind of how important to replicate that performance, take the pressure off the secondary?

PAT NARDUZZI: Getting pressure on the quarterback is obviously critical every week. With Kyle McCord back there with the ball in his hand, I mean, let me just tell you, third and medium, I mean if you look at third and medium -- okay, and third and long he's good, too. But third and medium, it's like -- I'm watching a videotape, and I'm like does the guy throw an incomplete pass. I mean, like, he's special. I mean he's as good a quarterback as I've seen that we've gotta defend this week.

So pressure on the quarterback, hurries on the quarterback. Again, he's going to give -- he does a great job in the pocket of just giving ground, if he's getting pressured, of giving ground. Then it's like, how did he complete that ball? But he's like Houdini back there. So he's fun to watch.

Q. Over 100 yards receiving to the tight end from Cal. Is there any different challenges Oronde Gadsden presence?

PAT NARDUZZI: Gadsden presents the same issue, okay, and they got problems all over the field. But, Amanda, the biggest problem is when you don't do your job and you don't cover the guy, he's going to catch the ball. Okay.

If you go back and look at that tape, the one time he went right down the middle and we got busted coverage. Everybody else is locked out. It's like if you're watching it, you're going, why is someone covering that guy, why is someone covering that guy perfect? Whoop! There's nobody on No. 3. Like what happened?

So we all know -- I mean, everybody knows in the entire stadium, like, someone messed up, right? So it's a coverage bust.

And then there's some other times he caught one across the field where it was a scramble where they were in certain coverage and he didn't pass it off. That comes down to pressure. And scramble, you gotta lock on your guy, and we didn't lock on, and he caught one coming out the backdoor.

But I think the best one is like when our guys are laser focused in a two-minute situation we go four plays and we're off the field and the game's over.

But, yeah, that's what it comes down to that focus for 60 minutes. It can't be 58. 58 will cost you, and it costs us -- you kind of want to go put pressure on the quarterback if someone gets anxious, like, oh, I think I can get home. You gotta cover your guy if your guys goes out. And it wasn't like the tight end was in the box and you thought maybe he was going to block. He was out there wide and we didn't cover him. So it was just a mental bust. Sometimes you have a little something pop in your head and you forget. Again, great opportunity to learn from those problems and still get a win.

Q. How did you feel about the way Terrence Enos and Jason Collier played on the left side? And if you have to go with replacements on those two spots again, would it be those two guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: Terrence Enos was the unsung hero on offense. So I can tell you that. Terrence Enos played really well coming in and replacing Branson. He got that opportunity, and he did a phenomenal job.

And Collier played okay, like he has played. We'd like it a little bit better in there, didn't play as good as he wanted to or we wanted to, but we gotta coach him better, too.

Q. Coach, you guys are 6 and 0 for the first time in



over 40 years. You obviously knew this group was special, but does this shock you at all that you're standing here at 6 and 0?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, nothing shocks me. We could have been sitting here last October 18th and been 6 and 0 as well, in my mind, because you're always positive, and I loved our kids last year. But this team has just got a different resilience.

And you love the team week by week by what they do. You kind of go, wow, you did it again. Oh, you did it again. You came back, you hung in there.

So it's every week it's how they play, how they respond through the adversity and even the successes they've had. But that's in the past, and we're working on -- I'm not surprised. I'm never surprised at anything in this world, but we need to respond. And we had three great days of practice and preparation already, and we'll get back up on Sunday and have another one then and Monday, Tuesday and get ready for the game.

Q. Defense was great against Cal. What makes you think it can be sustainable for the next six weeks?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think little by little you see improvement, you know. You see that young defensive line. You tend to see Kyle Lewis -- and Lovelace played outstanding, going back to Cal. Obviously Rasheem Biles didn't play in that game, and he will this weekend. But Lovelace played his tail off, you know. I threatened him with -- I threatened Lovelace. I was going to change his number, because I really loved how he played in No. 35. And he'll laugh because I'm telling this story.

So I text him, I said, I think you play good in 35. I want to change you back to 35. I didn't like 0. You were a better player at 35.

"Coach, I'll show you." And guess what, he showed me. So my hat goes off to Braylan just playing like he did, having the game he did, he was special. And you lose Lovelace -- or excuse me. You lose Biles for a game, and all of a sudden Lovelace steps up, and you're like, wow, that's what we've been looking for. We just found another player that could be an all-ACC player. So that's what you expect, guys to step up when they need to.

But just Lovelace, whether it's Jimmy Scott -- these guys just keep getting a little bit more confident the more reps they get. It's called development. Again, we do a good job developing our guys from year one to year four or game one to game four, five or six.

Q. Is in the deepest group of linebackers you've had sense you've been here?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. I remember there was one year in June, sitting out on the field, I was looking around, like, whoa, where are our linebackers at. I don't remember what year it was. Been here too many years. But there's -- I mean, we've got special guys. I mean, people would say, oh, you lost a couple, how could it be your deepest? But we've got Jordan Bass that just keeps getting a little bit better every game, which is what we want. We don't -- that instant success is scary. But like he keeps getting better.

Jeremiah Marcelin got a chance to get some meaningful reps, not mop-up duty at the end, and he learned some things, I think, from Saturday. And he's going to be a really good player.

So we've got play makers. We've got special guys. I don't know if it's the deepest. Maybe it is. Maybe I lied to you. You know. I don't know.

Q. You wouldn't.

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, by accident, I would, Jerry. By accident. I probably should say it's the best, right? I don't know.

Q. How is Ryland Gandy been for you this year?

PAT NARDUZZI: Ryland Gandy has been spectacular. Ryland Gandy has been -- I know he came into our season being the number one guy. Again, another guy -- him and Rashad Battle both continue to get better every week. Tamon -- you don't know what you're going to get going into the year. You got three brand new corners that are going to take in the majority of the reps. But Ryland has been that guy that is steady, and he's not going to be perfect, but there's no player or corner for sure that's lined up and pressed out there all the way on an island.

So I'm excited for him. And he's actually doing some games tonight, I think. He's doing a high school game tonight, doing the color, being a communications major, open week, Friday off. I'm not sure what game it is.

See Donovan coming in today all decked out in his gear for his game. It's a homecoming game. So I think a lot of our guys are going to have fun maybe going to some high school games. Whether they're going to watch that game, Peters Township game, or they're going to go do the color.

Q. (Indiscernible).

PAT NARDUZZI: It's important. It's more than important.

It's almost -- we played early in my tenure here a North Carolina team, play on Saturday and then played again on Thursday. That's brutal. I wouldn't wish that upon anybody in the country.

I think in the NFL when they play on a Sunday and they gotta play on a Thursday as well, just like shouldn't happen. I think it happened to the Steelers either last year or the year before. It's near impossible to practice. You're just -- I don't know what you're doing, you're going out and playing games, that's it, because you're really not practicing or you'll have a beat-up team.

It's huge, and then it gives you a couple -- I love a Thursday night game where you have the week off the week before so you got a few extra days to prepare for a Syracuse team, and then you got a couple extra days to prepare on the back end for that next game. Not only prepare as a coach, but get your team a little healthy. Two days means a lot for our kids' bodies. There's a lot of contact.

Q. You got nine and one coming off rest. What has been your approach -- a lot of you guys are so successful after the time off.

PAT NARDUZZI: I didn't know that record. I thought EJ would tell me, but of course. Just kidding, EJ.

It's a pretty good record. I would say probably that one is that one -- not extended time. That was not extended. That was lack of extension.

But I would say just getting our guys fresh. Freshness is important. I think freshness is good for everybody, mentally and physically.

For our guys to go to a high school game today, that's mental freshness, like it's a deep -- it's kind of just a sigh of relief just to kind of, hey, we don't have to play this weekend. Let's go have some fun at a high school game. I wish I could go out. The NCAA has taken days away from us, so I don't get to go to a high school game tonight. Usually I would be on a Friday night. So we got our players out scouting, looking for guys.

Q. They report back to you?

PAT NARDUZZI: They report back to me with some video, yes.

Q. You're halfway through the season with this new offense. What have you loved about it and what are some of the issues you've seen with it?

PAT NARDUZZI: What do I love about it? I like when you score points. And you're one of the most explosive offenses in the country, I think that's a bonus. One of the negatives is just time of possession. But I don't know if that has anything to do with that at all, you know.

I think there's two things that have maybe impacted time in possession in 2024. It's the invention of the green dot, you know.

While we're going up tempo, everybody else has slowed it down to a snail pace like we were last year. So to me, I'm just worried about being explosive on offense, scoring points. And I trust our defense, and we played an extra quarter last week.

I mean, the defense was on the field a quarter longer than our offense was, and that's one of the bad ones offensively that we've had during the year. So it's hard to play an extra quarter on defense and have the energy that our kids had at the end of that game defensively to get the stops they needed and make the plays they did.

I mean, when you look at that field goal, when they went up to line up for that field goal, we talk to our guys all the time about like a field goal formation, when it lines up, okay -- everybody knows what a field goal formation looks like, right? Center, two guards, two tackles, two tight ends and two wings, right? And our job as a defense is to destroy that formation.

You're not going to get a block every time, but it's punishing them, and at the end of the day, we want them to not look like a field goal team. You guys could watch some games tonight, and when the field goal team lines up and when it's done, you say, the field goal team -- the formation is still there. We want to try to destroy that formation. That's our goal is just to penetrate, pound, pound, pound until something happens, and our kids did that.

But I would say the impact of, Amanda, the offense is probably time in possession, but I think it's also been magnified because of everybody is slowing it down, and everybody's using the green dots, and they're going to wait to break the huddle -- you'll see this weekend, I would imagine, Syracuse -- you know, they do a little tempo, I would say like 25 percent tempo, but we'll see. Always expect more. But they're going to wait till 15 seconds left in the play clock and then break the huddle.

It's happened all year. People are breaking the huddle with 15 seconds left so that I can't talk to Jerry and tell Jerry, hey, watch out for this, hey, check this or let's check this. They don't want any communication going on. So that's why they've slowed down. It's a response to, hey, we can

slow down. They'd rather have no communication for the defense than line up fast and let you have communication.

Q. (Indiscernible) resigned today, cited poor health. He's one of many high-profile coaches, including Nick Saban to resign recently.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. And our head basketball over there at Villanova as well a couple years ago. He got out before Cave did.

It's going to survive. It's never going to go anywhere. It's who's going to hang in there long enough to continue to ride the waves, right?

I mean, to me you have to change with the times, and it's part of the job. That's what we do. It's why we do what we do. You gotta embrace change, I guess. I mean some people want to embrace it, some people are like I don't need it, right?

Anytime someone says, hey, I don't need it anymore -- he probably decided months ago he didn't need it and made that decision yesterday. So I just think it's what you want to put up with, you know. And he decided he didn't want to put up with any more; he was going to probably sit on a beach somewhere and enjoy himself. God bless him.

Q. Why do you hang in there?

PAT NARDUZZI: Because you love to compete. You love to compete. You love to play this game and you love to coach these kids. Just the interaction with our guys in the team meeting in the mornings, that's why you do it. If you're just doing it for other reasons, like if you're just doing it for Saturdays and the joy of a Saturday afternoon, you're struggling; you're out the door as soon as you can. You better be doing it for more than just a couple reasons. Better have a lot of reasons. It's the love of the game.

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