

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Coming off another win, obviously we closed the chapter on Syracuse last night. Outstanding job by our football team. Preparation, I think it always starts with preparation, how we practice, and to dismantle a team like we did, especially defensively -- we were on the field for 102 snaps. We lost time of possession by 22 minutes. Our guys didn't look back, don't care. They were out there eating.

Our offense only had 45 snaps, so they weren't on the field very long just because we couldn't. But it was an impressive performance, especially defensively, and again, would have been nice to give our offense more snaps, but we got a lot of guys to play the game, as well.

That was the other thing. In the past we've gotten guys snaps against Youngstown State but we were able to get twos and threes in the game, especially defensively, because of the amount of snaps we had and the score and what it was.

Moving on to the next one in SMU, Rhett Lashlee, won a conference championship a year ago, has stumbled only once this season, so they've got a great football team. He's heck of a coach. Happy for him. We're looking forward to going down to Dallas.

Defensively they're four-down, change it up coverage-wise a little bit, but to me they're very similar to us defensively in my opinion because I think they're simple. I don't think they do a lot. I think what they do is sound and they just play hard and play fast. That's why they've had so much success.

I think they're ranked 24th in the country in rush defense, I believe, or -- let me get my stats right here. Rush defense they are fifth in the country, excuse me, so probably No. 1 in the ACC I would imagine.

In rush offense -- they're a running team compared to what we saw last week, a passing team. This is a team that's going to want to run it at you. Does a great job running it at everybody, but 24th in the country rushing offense.



Defensively, interesting, you talk about transfer portal, they have 17 guys in their two-deep that are portal guys. As a matter of fact, I think every one of their starters is from the portal, every one of them on defense. Offensively they only have seven guys from the portal so I thought that was an interesting thing, like holy cow.

They've got a lot of good players. They're talented across the board. Their two defensive ends stand out, Harvey and Roberts. Those guys stand out on defense.

Obviously the tailback and obviously Kevin Jennings their quarterback, Brashard Smith, their tailback, and their receiver, No. 13, Roderick Daniels, he's kind of a slash guy, plays a little tailback, plays a little receiver. Not quite sure what to call him, a tailback, but he's a slash. Pittsburgh knows what that is from the old days.

But really good football team that we've got to prepare to come after them again.

Q. What kind of problem does Kevin Jennings present with his mobility?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, he's really athletic, unlike what we saw last week. We know last week, he could sling it and throw it accurate, 2nd and 3rd down conversions, but this guy is going to -- he's got a strong arm. He can zip it in there. It's like he's playing darts out there. He throws darts.

Obviously he can beat you with his feet, so we're going to have to contain him the best we can, but he's a guy that likes to scramble and take off running. That'll be the challenge this week.

Q. When you watched what SMU did Saturday night, when you watched it yesterday, what were the differences between studying the game and watching it live?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's totally different. You listen to the announcers and what they say and you're getting a totally different view, but watching All-22 is the fun part. That's why we coach. I actually woke up Saturday morning early and watched it on the iPad just to -- the All-22.



It was a well-played game. I think both teams battled it out and it came down to a two-point play.

Q. How is Eli doing and what was your biggest takeaway from the last game?

PAT NARDUZZI: Biggest notes coming away from the last game, loved how we executed 3rd down as far as just defensively. We talked about probably key to victory was what we did on 3rd down, like 3rd down getting off the field, but with them being as good as they were, I know I raved on Monday and last Thursday about their 3rd down because it was scary watching 3rd and medium, but to think that on 3rd down we got three interceptions -- I think everybody talks about the three pick sixes and all of that, but three of those interceptions were on 3rd down. Maybe four of them as a matter of fact.

One was a pick six by Louis, Brandon George's was 3rd down, PJ's was 3rd down, so it was three. But what you do on 3rd down, that was the most incredible thing.

I love the selflessness out of our football team. I don't think we have a selfish soul in the room. To me, selfless teams win championships, okay. When you're worried about what do I get from this or me, me, me, me, you have a problem. Going back to that we-we versus me-me, I think that's one thing, and just the way our guys play.

I look back to their attitude, our kids got great attitude. Effort, these guys are flying around offensively and defensively, whether you've got 45 plays or 102. I think we're a tough football team, and I think we got after it. We enjoyed playing. We love the game.

Our knowledge, probably one thing we still can improve on both sides, just constantly consistently having details all the time. That comes down to knowledge, whether it's reading a coverage on offense as a receiver or as a quarterback or a running back for that matter.

Hope I answered your question, at least part of it.

Q. What's an example of Eli embracing the we, not me, in the way that he practices and plays?

PAT NARDUZZI: Eli doesn't care about the stats. He wants to win football games. I think that's what it comes down to. But Eli is the same guy every day in practice. He is the same guy. He practices hard. He pays attention to details. You're not looking at this grumpy Eli out at practice one day and the next day he's happy and then game day he's this and that. He's the same person, which is what you like. You like that consistent personality. You know what you're going to get every day. I'd say that for

probably 90 percent of our football team, which is a good thing.

Q. (Indiscernible) take reps with the first team in practice?

PAT NARDUZZI: He'll get some reps with the first team, no question about it. We'll wait and see.

Q. You missed the first part of Chris's question a minute ago, though --

PAT NARDUZZI: I did?

Q. Yeah, you must have forgotten.

PAT NARDUZZI: Hey, it's a wait-and-see, we'll see. You guys know I don't talk about injuries. That's every individual's -- that's his deal.

Q. After the Cal game, the lesson for Eli was take what the defense gives you. Seemed like that was the big lesson from that game. What was the lesson for him from the Syracuse game?

PAT NARDUZZI: Number one, he protected the ball. When you think about being plus five in the game and giving up zero, so he did protect the ball.

I thought he did a good job. He protected the ball, he got it where he needed to get it, and I don't have any other evaluation for him. Might be a good question for Coach Bell. I'm sure he could pick and pick and pick. But he managed the game and handed it off when you need to and got to make some plays.

Q. (Indiscernible).

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I think every week is a big game. Like Syracuse, 5-1, I don't care, ranked, unranked, all that ranking, whoever ranks them, who cares. But last week was a big game. Every game is big. Cal was a big game. That was a good football team. That was a great defense that came in here. Shoot, they shouldn't have lost the games -- they should have beat Miami who's an undefeated team. Every week I can point to who you're playing, but this is just the next one in line, and it's a road trip, it's a night game.

We're fired up to be on the ACC Network finally. We get the road show there, whatever they call it, and get with that crew. I think that's always fun. They really haven't seen us this year; that's great. We haven't had a 3:30 game, we haven't had a noon game with our ACC Network, so that's our network, so we're excited about that. So fired up.

It's a big game. It's just the next game. Guess what; next week Virginia will be a big game, a big one.

Q. How have you seen Kade work with Eli? You can't always have the same approach as a coach; you've got to push players in different ways. How have you seen Kade challenge him in different ways to guide him in the right direction?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think just different ways of watching videotape with the guys, whether we're watching a cutup this way or that way or watching this cutup, watching people take advantage of some of the things that we want him to take advantage of.

But that's coaching, and that's a daily process. You always change how you get your message across.

Q. How much do you emphasize slash plays and what was it like watching your defense make those plays left and right?

PAT NARDUZZI: Well, we're always working on turnovers. You guys come out to practice tomorrow and you'll see the first period is always turnover circuit. It doesn't always work out the way you want it, but you're always emphasizing making plays. You want your guys to make big plays. That's what they want to do, whether it's punching a ball out or a pick six. That's what you want, but that's -- our guys got a lot of confidence, I can tell you that. Whether it's the D-line or the linebackers or the DBs.

You think about Jordan Bass coming out there and getting a tipped ball for PJ's interception. It was just guys making plays and being in the right place. Jordan Bass is in the right spot, and he's not supposed to turn around and get the pick on that coverage, and again, that's kind of the way it's supposed to be done.

So it's just fun to watch guys make plays and do it the way they're supposed to, whether they're splash plays or not. You don't necessarily win with splash plays. You can blow somebody out with splash plays, I can tell you that, but it's about the details.

Most impressive thing is defensively we gave up two explosives the entire game against a team that's pretty explosive and got an NFL quarterback in the backfield. One was on a bubble where we just don't fit it right, which is something we do every single day. Things that drive you nuts, it's like we fit a bubble like that all the time, and you fit and ran right behind the linebacker and we give up the biggest 40-yard pass, that drives me nuts because we practice it a lot, and then we gave up fade ball, which I

think was good coverage, but there was two. Two. You'll win a lot of games when you only give up two big plays.

Everybody talks about the press corners, oh -- we've done a nice job of playing good defense. Like I said, Coach -- I'll rave about the offensive coaches again; Coach Bates and Manalac and Daoust and Cory Sanders and Archie Collins, those corners keep getting better every week as far as just the coverage part of it.

Just watching that progress has been fun, but it's not about the splash, it's about the consistency and execution because you can have a pick six and next play give up six on a fade. That splash play didn't matter; you just nullified it.

Q. How much progress do you think Nate made being backup quarterback Saturday?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, it's hard to tell. The only way you find out is when you get in the game, right? And he didn't have, what, 10 plays or something like that. He didn't have very many at the end there. We would have liked to have gotten him more, but he played a quarter of the game based on offensive snaps.

But I think he gets better in practice. He's locked in all the time. He's in the office early today ready to roll.

Q. What does it mean to have the addition of SMU to the conference and what does it mean for you to have that kind of team in front of you right now?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, that's not my job to evaluate. That can be commissioner. To me it's good to have a good football team in the conference, good coaches, and I'm looking forward to going down to Dallas and seeing what they've got down there. I've never played SMU. It's one of those games you never played at, so different stadium. Growing up, Eric Dickerson in those goggles, that's kind of what I grew up in, that era. That guy was a dude, watching him run down there.

It's homecoming. We're a homecoming team, so maybe I'll get to meet Eric Dickerson at the 50-yard line or something like that.

Q. Obviously your offensive line has dealt with some adversity, losing Terrence for the rest of the season. How have you seen them come together? Have you seen progress?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, Terrence, I think someone asked me after the game how Terrence played, and as a matter of fact we had one guy, we grade them -- we give

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

percentage grades, but we talk about winning or low winning. I think we had one low winner. I'll announce that doing my radio show, so don't spill the beans there.

We had three guys -- four other guys play high average in the 40-some plays they played in. But Enos did not hurt us. He was high average, which is I guess a notch below winning. You can be low average if you wanted to be.

So solid against a good football team that did a lot of different stuff.

Q. With Poppi and C.J. having touchdowns in the last game, what's it been like having the two guys working with Kade Bell this season?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, it's been fun. On Poppi's touchdown, you think about just how he ran that route, just running with speed and taking care of business and he ran a great route. Gavin Bartholomew cleared out, really helped open up that play. The factors that maybe you don't see, just watch Poppi run, but Gavin ran a nice route, as well. You look at that and you look at his touchdown pass, he catches in the seam, he finds grass. We were on kind of a mesh -- we call it a mesh home concept where it's crossing routes with a guy spotting down over the ball, and he did a nice job and then he turns around and gets vertical.

So whoever is making it -- Kenny Johnson had three nice catches, almost I think back-to-back-to-back, so regardless of who gets the ball, nobody determines -- Gavin had three catches, so we're spreading it around as much as we can based on what the coverages tell us to do.

Q. How well have they played this season and all of the --

PAT NARDUZZI: Who is they?

Q. The linebackers. And all the talk surrounding that group, are they kind of the heartbeat of the team right now in terms of bringing the energy every week?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, I hope not. They bring energy all the time. They've got swag. They're certainly confident. Linebackers like to talk a lot, so that's good.

But you could say they're the heartbeat. People are going to feed off them. But they had one of those games, like do it again. If you get three more pick sixes, maybe you're the heartbeat, but we'd better have a bunch of heartbeats. If that's all we're waiting for, linebackers to make a play, we're in deep trouble here for the next five games, three of which are on the road.

But we're going to feed off them, but we talk to our guys all the time about feeding off, whether it's C.J. and Poppi and Desmond and Eli and that offensive line, Ryan Baer knocking people off the ball. Whatever it is, we want to feed off the good plays, regardless of what they are.

Ben Saul, he's a heartbeat. Junko is punting the ball. I mean, Junko? In this room you guys ought to have a vote on most improved, but Junko -- again, it's called progress. It's called development. And Coach Bronowski has done an outstanding job with him in his kicking game.

Q. How has Sean FitzSimmons helped you guys pull things together? Obviously it's more than just him, but since he's been back you guys have steadily gotten better.

PAT NARDUZZI: It starts up front, as we know. He's been very reliable inside. You know what you're going to get. There's no up and downs. Nahki Johnson made some big plays. He made a big play on the screen, but it's kind of one of those plays that ticks you off as a coach, another negative play - you focus on the negative plays - is the 3rd down and 3. Sincere and Chief maybe jump offsides, give them a 1st down, a free play, but we also get a strip sack. That's another sack. Even if we don't get the strip, it's another sack. Add another sack to the list. But we're putting pressure on the quarterback.

But Nahki was productive in some of those little things like that. Anytime you're productive inside those -- those D-tackles are critical, and they'd better be really good this week because SMU is going to want to run the football. You talk about stop the run and RPOs, this is SMU and Rhett Lashlee.

Q. A lot of your fans weren't too happy you're undefeated and only ranked No. 18 in the country. What would you tell those fans?

PAT NARDUZZI: Hey, let's just be 1-0 every week. I started off saying I don't care about the rankings. Tell them not to get caught up in the numbers. The stats don't matter. The only thing that matters is wins and losses. If we keep doing what we're doing, I think we'll be in good shape in the end. Don't you think so? Tell them that, would you? I don't go on Twitter and read what all the fans out there -- relax. Let's just support the football team. Looking at the camera, support the football team and let's just keep going 1-0. That's what I'd say. All that stuff doesn't matter. You look at the preseason rankings, how bad are those? Where are they now?

There's a lot of overrated teams up there and maybe some



underrated teams.

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