

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

Monday, November 11, 2024

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Pat Narduzzi

### Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Coming off another disappointing home loss to a good football team, I'll say that. They did a nice job. They played hard. We're hungry.

Just coming off that ballgame, for as many little things we had go wrong, however you want to call it, for all the penalties we had offensively -- I think we had three on defense and way too many on offense. I can at least count them on defense. Two of them were just -- you know, a guy lining up offsides barely.

Just with everything that was done in that game to maybe lose the game and shoot ourselves in the foot, at the end of the game, we had a chance to win the football game and we didn't pull it out. In the past we found ways of getting that done, and we didn't get it done Saturday. Your luck starts to run out a little bit. For whatever reason. We know there's reasons out there.

We closed that last night. We're heading on to Clemson, maybe the best football team we've played this year. I shouldn't say maybe. They are. They're 315 across the line on their defensive line. They've got some big dudes. They're athletic, a bunch of first rounders on defense and offense.

I think their offensive line is probably the best offensive line I've seen this year without a question. As a matter of fact, someone asked me last week, one of your reporters, who is the best offensive line? I gave it to him, and I meant to text him. I forget who it was about what the best offensive line, and I gave him two. But if I remembered who the heck it was, I'd give him a call back and say this is it. These guys are big, fast, physical.

Our D tackles had better hang in there because these dudes are going to double-team you and try to and hang you on the goal post up front.

Their tailback, Phil Mafah, he plays 90 percent of the time. He's 230 pounds, very similar to the tailback at North Carolina. He's athletic, he's physical, and they like to run the ball. Obviously Cade, their quarterback, is really good



too.

They're winning for a reason, and we've got a really good football team that we've got to be well-prepared for coming in this weekend.

**Q. With your offense, on the offensive line, seen both quarterbacks -- by choice or by not, you've seen both quarterbacks. You've got receivers. You've done a lot of things personnel-wise. What is still on the table for you for adjustments and changes to try to improve going forward?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We're going to see if you can play wideout this week. You think he could?

Hey, that's what you do in college football. We can't go get a free agent. You deal with what you have to deal with, and you try to juggle and try to put the best 11 players on the field offensively and defensively and special teams. But you move around, and you try to get the best fit. We'll try to get the best 11 players on the field next week. That's our job.

It's not easy sometimes, but the first thing we've got to do is make sure we don't shoot ourselves in the foot offensively. That's what it comes down to. We had way too many first and 15s, second and 15s.

You talk about -- I think someone mentioned it maybe the last couple weeks, third down, it's hard to convert third and long, period, I don't care who you are. When you talk about a third down conversion, go back and look and see where we are third and short, third and medium, third and long, that's probably a better indication. E.J. and his gang don't break that down on game day.

Third down and long, if you're in a bunch of third and longs and you got to get 15 to get a first down, you make it hard on the quarterback, you make it hard on everybody, and you make it hard on the O-line because people are thinking obviously you've got to pass it a little bit.

We've got to make sure we only need 10 yards every first time we touch the ball.

**Q. To get through to players to have that focus, what do you use?**



PAT NARDUZZI: We haven't done that all year, so it's attention to detail. It's focus. Was there a reason? I don't know how you couldn't be focused. Did we think we were way better than them or something? I have no idea.

I can't imagine, coming off a loss at SMU, that you would not be locked in and focused, but it's got to be there. That's our coaches' job, that's my job to make sure they're focused. So I'll blame it on me.

**Q. You've made some changes to the offensive line. Are you happy with it?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know. I guess, are we going to stay with it? We'll figure that out.

Was I happy with it? Some things I was happy; sometimes I wasn't. But we've certainly got to do a better job. I think you get better by reps. You look at Isaiah Montgomery, his first start. We saw Terrence Enos, his first start looked like at Notre Dame a year ago. When you look at just guys playing in their first ballgame and getting their feet wet, so you knew it wasn't going to be a perfect day, but he did some good things.

I think one of the one sacks he gave up, we had a chip, and Gavin comes down and clips the guy and the guy gets a sack. You're thinking you're trying to help and maybe we hurt him, but he was getting chip help there.

Overall, there were some good things, but I think there's growing pains whenever you make that move. Part of the thought process was take Ryan Baer, moving from right to left, are we hurting Ryan Baer? So there's all those, okay, now the right tackle is broken in and the left tackle is broken. It's all the conversations you have, and you just try to put the best 11 guys on the field at one time, which if nobody got hurt, it would make it a lot easier.

**Q. (No microphone)?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I thought he made some really good decisions. Coach Bell -- I think you guys talk to Coach Bell later in the week. Eli made some good decisions. Just didn't throw the ball as well as we wanted him to, wasn't as accurate. A couple of times up the middle, he wasn't as accurate as he's been, but as far as his decision-making and putting the ball where it's supposed to go, he did that more often than not.

**Q. How have you seen Nate react over the course of the year to not being starter? What has he worked on?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We've had a lot of confidence in Nate.

Obviously he doesn't get the reps, so any time you get put in that position at the end of the game, you feel bad for him because he doesn't get the reps. I don't think that's a fair exam on who Nate Yarnell is, and if he's ever to get a start again, I think if he was able to get starting reps, that you'd see a different guy.

But he's done a great job hanging in there. Obviously those two picks in the second half, you're not happy with. We talked about Eli in the first half, up until the point where he gets hurt, we're moving the ball, and he's protecting the ball. So you give that to Eli, and that's kind of why he won that starting job is protecting the ball and keeping it from the other team.

When you think about that, he's done a nice job as far as for the most part of not taking chances and being smart with the football, not easy.

**Q. Do you anticipate Eli playing Saturday? That's not answering the question.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Everybody is playing Saturday except Branson Taylor. You won't see Branson.

**Q. Chances are we'll see Eli?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Depends what Chris Hanks tells me. Our doctors make all those decisions. I wish I could tell you. I don't even go down to the training room to see.

I stay out of the training room. That's not my job. My job is to coach football and let some of the best medical trainers in the country to take care of -- if you could sneak down to the training room, you might find out, Will. You've got to build a relationship with Hanks.

**Q. This is more of a big picture question. When you look at the ACC, you guys won't have anybody inside the top 10 as a league. Part of that is because you're beating each other, right? Do you worry the perception, the preseason perception, look at the Big Ten and the SEC, they've got all this, and if you look at the rankings, they're near the top. Is there a worry the ACC parity has been a bad thing?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I'll say this again, the ACC from top to bottom is the best conference out there. Every weekend anybody can beat anybody. The Virginia football team was a good team. They've got their whole entire offensive line back. They were down three guys. They weren't out for the year.

I think the ACC is top to bottom is really good. Yeah, it hurts when you're beating each other up, no question

about it.

**Q. Are you concerned the league is being dinged a little bit more for losses as opposed to what you see in other conferences?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Probably. I don't go evaluate it. The disrespect is there preseason. I'm sure it's there midseason.

**Q. With the quarterbacks, you say Eli is making good decisions. He's been hit quite a bit at this point. Do you see any change in his demeanor in terms of like maybe first read's not there, I'm just going to try to make a play with my legs as opposed to making progressions?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Sometimes. You can watch his eyes and what he's doing there. Again, he's been under pressure. We've seen that. I think that's obvious.

Obviously when he got dinged up, it was on a run, and he's trying to slide, and that's a targeting. You wish he'd just dive and go get it. Somebody everybody thinks that sliding is the best thing to do. Sometimes you're taking unnecessary hits if you just frickin' go. And then he's slowing down, which makes it even harder, I think.

**Q. Going against Clemson, what makes them a different team than you've seen in the past?**

PAT NARDUZZI: What makes them different? I don't know if it's been much different. They've been talented since I've been here. This is our fifth time playing them. We've played them four previous times already, once in a championship game. They're talented. Nothing's different.

They've got a bunch of four and five-star players. They've got the best of the best. They've had the best for a long, long time. They've been the measuring stick, as far as ACC football, for many years, and Dabo does a great job.

**Q. Speaking of Rodney Hammond, he played four games this season and didn't play Saturday. Is there a consideration for him taking a redshirt and coming back next year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: For sure. We're playing that as far as just making sure we didn't waste a year. So we'll see how the whole thing goes. We're not just going to put him in there just to put him in there.

**Q. Did you hear from the ACC about -- you said after the game that the ACC we'll hear Monday or Tuesday about that call?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I've heard, and you guys know I'm not going to talk about officiating. I'm going to be smart, and I'm not going to say a word, but you guys all watched the tape. That's probably all I need to say.

**Q. How would you -- was the explanation to your satisfaction?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You watch the videotape. That's all that needs to be said. I'm not allowed to say anything about what I heard or said or was told. Not happy.

**Q. It's Senior Day. What has this group meant to you, the ones that have been through a lot of different experiences this year.**

PAT NARDUZZI: I forgot about that. I'm glad you brought that up. Senior Day every year matters. I talked to our team last night just about playing for our seniors again, going out there and being -- all these seniors. All these guys that sit in the front row, love each and every one of them. I don't care if they've been here for just six months, three months. You build a relationship with these guys every day, see them every morning, good morning every morning.

The relationship we've got with our players is primary. I want to see them all go out on top, number one. We'll have a nice senior evening Friday night before the game and have all the parents in there. So it's a special night, it's a special day.

I can't say enough about these seniors and their leadership and just need to finish the season strong, need their leadership.

**Q. The demeanor aspect of the guys?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Like normal. Like normal. Like when you tell your wife you're going to be home for dinner and she gets mad at you because you're two hours late.

**Q. She's way past that.**

PAT NARDUZZI: She doesn't care about you anymore?

No, obviously they're down, just like they were the week before. No different, same as they were the week before. Nobody likes to take one in the chin, take a loss. They're down, and they should be.

But they were great walking out of here last night, and that's the most important thing.



**Q. I heard you say after the Cincinnati game, when they got down, there was confidence on the sideline, the guys knew they were going to win. Now with the way the last two games have gone, really Syracuse and Cal a little bit with the way the offense has played, are you concerned about some of the confidence waning? Have you seen some of the confidence waning?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No, I'm not concerned about confidence. There was confidence there in the fourth quarter. Nate Yarnell walked by me, and he said, don't worry, Coach, we're going to win the game. There's confidence. There's swag on the sideline.

I think that's probably what makes it more disappointing. Defense gets a stop. Everybody is like we're going to go down and score. Then we throw a pick, and defense goes out there. We give up a first down. We have a little execution issue on defense. We had two first downs there. We should have got the ball back again, which again is what we call four-minute drill. We can't have 1 of 11 not doing their job. It wasn't a real good play there.

But I believe our kids have confidence. I think they thought they were going to pull it out, and when you're in the last 2:06 and you go, okay, here it is. Here we go again. The kids had confidence without question. That's what crushes you. That's what's like, oh, you didn't get it done. So that hurts.

You take back SMU, our kids didn't quit in that game, but that was going to be a tough comeback. That wasn't what this weekend was.

**Q. Are they still -- do you sort of consider Clemson the gold standard of the conference?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I do, I do, because of consistency over a period of time. Florida State can go win one. Pitt can go win one. We've been there twice in the last, whatever, nine years. A lot of people haven't been there that many times.

I think I said back in the summer three teams, Florida State, Clemson, and Pitt, have won it in the last 13 years, 14 years. But when you think about Clemson, they've done it over and over. They might have a bad year here or there, but historically Dabo's done the best job. That's plain and simple. The numbers will tell you that.

**Q. Does that get the attention of the kids in the room? I'm not saying you don't have respect for them, but some names stand out more than others sometimes.**

PAT NARDUZZI: No doubt about it. If last week didn't get

their motor going, I hope anyone who has ambitions about playing in the National Football League, let's see what you've got against Clemson. Let's see you play your best game here.

If you weren't focused for Virginia, which I can't imagine you weren't -- and I'm not saying anybody was not focused -- but if they didn't get your focus, I imagine Clemson will get your focus when you put the tape on.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

