

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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## Coach Pat Narduzzi

### Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Obviously really excited to get the season started, get the first practice in. Grateful for you guys coming from Latrobe and working with the Steelers and being here. Got a great crowd today so appreciate all the hard work you put into Pitt football.

I think we've got a talented football team. They're fired up. They're energetic. They're locked in. I think we have as good a leadership as I've seen here just through the summers. Just less issues here and there, and there's always issues, but less issues than we've had the last couple years for whatever reason.

Coach Stacchiotti has had a heck of a summer with our guys, and we're excited to get this thing rolling.

**Q. The past three years you started a transfer quarterback in his first year with the program. Eli is obviously coming back as the starter. What does that do for your program and what have you seen from him?**

PAT NARDUZZI: When you look back at guys you had in their second year, it's been a while since we had a two-year quarterback, from Slovis to Phil to last year to before him was Kenny.

So it's nice to go into year two. I got a lot of questions last week down in Charlotte about year two, year two of the offense with Coach Bell, year two with Eli at quarterback. That's always special when you've got that continuity. There's nothing better than you're going into the season knowing what Eli has done, what kind of football player he is. We're not sitting there wondering what's going to happen on game day. I think we all have a pretty good idea.

He had a heck of a day today, throwing the ball and scrambling. He took off; man, I haven't seen scramble like that since last season. Spring ball he certainly didn't. He moved but not as clean as he did today out of the pocket, and it was a small little hole that he burst through.



But we're fired up to have him year two.

**Q. How impressive is that just in this day and age with all these kids that are in the transfer portal and to have him come back and have that continuity when all of that is going on? Does that also speak to the program, and he's dedicated obviously?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Absolutely. Eli is dedicated but there's a bunch of them are. I don't know the background stories. I heard last week in Charlotte that people were hitting Des up. It's a great thing it never got to my office. I have a lot of meetings in my office, but it gets real when they're there. But that tells you there was not even a thought of it. He can talk about it now and we can have all kinds of stories, but it wasn't an issue where we were like, oh, what's going on, what are we doing here, what can we do to help.

We had a lot of guys get tampered with. It's the name of the game right now. It's awful for college football to have tampering and have GMs calling your players and finding out if they're interested.

If this transfer portal opens up, and they're talking about April, May, if it opens up later it's just going to allow more time for teams and colleges to evaluate your talent, and they have three months to evaluate talent who find out who they want and they've got three months to tamper as opposed to one portal window in December and January. I know they're talking about one portal window. Let's hope there's one and let's hope it's the right time, too.

**Q. This is year 11 for you. With where college football is now, what kind of pressure have you felt to get this program back to that 20-21 level?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You never feel pressure. If you feel pressure, you've got issues. I'm never feeling pressure. You have what you have. I feel like we should have won 11 games a year ago. If we would have got blown out in six games, I'd really feel like that's not good, but we go out every week, as coaches, as head coach, as players, our guys, they work as hard as anybody in the country.

We had a little luck early in the season. We didn't get lucky near the end of the season. I felt like there was two games I was disappointed in, that Louisville game and that SMU game. Other than that, if I'm a fan, I'm going, shoot, 11 --

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every game is going down to the fourth quarter, and it's a game of inches and you've got to win those inches and sometimes you do and sometimes you don't. But there's never a feeling of pressure.

When you work like we do, you don't worry about that. I'd feel pressure if I didn't work so hard, if our staff didn't give everything we've got.

**Q. How do you think Eli's has grasped things since last year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, you can imagine, everybody has grasped year two better than year one, but he certainly is far and above where he was a year ago.

Again, add another year on to that, where is he going to be next year as we're talking in 2026. There's so many off-season meetings. We've been meeting all summer. It's not like the guys reported to camp today. In the NFL they reported to camp when they reported out to Latrobe.

Our guys have been here all summer. We're allowed to have them all summer. Stacchiotti has got them all summer. We gave them the 4th of July week off. Other than that, they've been summer term 1 and 2. They've been here all year, and they're meeting. They're meeting with coaches. They're meeting with their positions. They'll have individual meetings where it's player-led. They're into the tape.

As a matter of fact, I walked out of here today after practice, Nate Temple is like, Coach, can we get all the big plays on a cutup so we can watch them as a team, as a defense. I'm like, yeah, it's real easy. Push a couple buttons and we've got it.

They are into it like that, which I've never had a player after practice once say I want that video made.

**Q. Talk about the leadership; how much is it a part of the message from those guys on down that they want to get kind of the bad taste out of their mouth from the end of last year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, they talk about it, certainly. To me, it's those losses. It's the missed free throw. It's the missed three-pointer to lose the game. That's how you learn. You don't learn by winning every week. You learn by those bumps in the road, the bad days, and you bounce back.

Like I said, I never questioned our kids' effort a year ago. I could question a lot of things, but I won't do it on camera today.

But our kids played their tails off and gave it all they did based on the health that we had on our football team. It's hard when your starting quarterback is not out there. Eli was 7-1 as a starter and then you're bouncing around and it's just different.

**Q. Your defense was strong last year, specifically the linebackers. Do you think this group you have this season might hit that threshold too?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No question about it, and I think our D-line is better as well. With Braylan Lovelace in the middle, Biles on one side, Louis on the other side, that's three guys that can run. And again, Lovelace, no one is really talking about him, but he reminds of SirVocea Dennis inside. He's not the biggest guy in the world, but he can run and make plays. We've got three outside linebackers playing linebacker this year, and I think -- we've got a talented football team. We've got to stay healthy. We've got to play complementary football offensively and defensively, which I think we will even better than we did a year ago.

**Q. Very strong nucleus of returning players from last year. Obviously in this day and age that's not easy to do. How did you go about doing that, about maintaining your roster, and is that indicative of so many guys wanting to come back is that there is a belief in the room about something special being possible this year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think it starts with who we are. The No. 1 program goal here is having relationships with our players, and I think that's where it starts. We didn't have to fight to get our guys to come back and be here because I think of how it is every day. It's not oh, the portal is closing, let's be nice to our guys this week.

That's kind of how we are -- I think you've got genuine people in this building that love each other, and I think when you have that, money -- we had guys get offered a lot more money to go someplace else, get tampered with that don't even say a word. They want to be here. They want to play in Pittsburgh. They love what we do, how we do it here. It's a tribute to Allen Greene and Chancellor Gabel, just the support we're getting from up in the athletic department.

**Q. You've had a lot of great running backs over the years. What does Des Reid need to do this season to get to that level?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Des Reid, boy. I think if he just does what he did last year plus whatever. I thought he had a



great answer to a question last week: Do you need to get a break? He goes, I'll do whatever the team needs.

So it's not about his stats. He's as selfless as you get. When he gets an opportunity to touch the ball, whether it's catching it, running it, returning it, just be who you are, and that's what I know we'll get out of that guy. He's consistent. He's not going to have a big head coming into '25 that I want All-American and I don't need to practice. That's not him at all.

He's ready to roll, and he'll be on that list of great backs here at tailback.

**Q. With the amount of injuries you guys had last year, is there more of an emphasis on load management during camp this year as compared to other ones?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, a little bit more, but I don't think that had anything -- when your left tackle and your right tackle trip over each other and fall down, it's not like -- I don't want to say freak accident, but we've got to be smarter on the field. But you don't look at a lot of those injuries, they sometimes happen. We came out of camp healthy last year for the most part, I believe. It's just those odd injuries, whether it's Eli getting down, that hip drop tackle, whatever it may be. We just had some interesting deals there.

I think we'll be okay. But load management, I think we do that already. We have the GPSes on. We're monitoring how many minutes we're on the field, how many plays we scrimmaged today. We had 43 total team reps 11 against 11. So the amount of plays that we want to get in for the day, we try to stay on that number without trying to go overboard.

**Q. You had four players named to pretty prestigious preseason award watch lists. Do you pay any attention to that? Do the guys pay any attention to that? Do you talk to them, like hey, that's pretty cool, or is it rat poison and you're telling them don't even pay attention?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Probably rat poison. No, I don't talk to them about it because it really doesn't matter. Those are preseason awards. Postseason different deal. When someone gets a postseason All-American, that's a big deal. Someone is a Heisman Trophy finalist in New York, that's a big deal. But preseason? That could be gone in a weekend.

**Q. A little extra juice though, like nationally we are being recognized, maybe we can go out there and prove it?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I definitely think it gives them some juice, then we'll yell at them for an average practice. But it definitely, I think, gets kids excited. That's what they want. That's their next step to maybe going to the National Football League, and having those accolades is really what they want. But it comes down to what are you going to do on videotape. What are you going to do? We're exactly 30 days out from our opener against Duquesne, and we've got a lot of work to do and we can't be thinking about our preseason honors.

**Q. For spring ball, your quarterback room changed. I don't think we've talked about Cole Gonzales. What does he bring to this room, and what did you see to want to bring him in?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, right now, obviously Eli is QB1, but that QB2 spot is open. We saw Mason this spring. Mason does a heck of a job. Cole is another addition that I think -- we tried to get him the first round, he went to Oklahoma, he's back. We're excited to have him back.

What he brings to the room as a new guy is the offense he knows. He's played in the offense. He's accurate. He's got some stuff to him. He's a leader. He really does have some leadership skills. Heard him last night.

Just his leadership, his knowledge of the game of football, the experience he has, and again, his knowledge of our offense is going to really get him up to a point where he can compete for a job.

**Q. Change in the roster limits, now 85 scholarships. How many scholarships do you anticipate using this year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we're going to be at 85. We'll be at 85, period. Again, just talking roster, I'll tell you if somebody is out or somebody is in I'll give you a little update.

But the one thing, Derrick Davis will be medicated, so when you talk about 85 scholarships, he'll be a medical scholarship, so he does not count in the 85. That knee injury, he tore everything in that knee and he probably wouldn't be ready until November if he was ready at all. So he will take over a coaching role.

John Glenn also, a kid from Georgia, a walk-on, he's also going to go into a coaching role, and he's done a great job. He did signals up here, and his mom would be proud of some of the signaling he did this morning in this meeting.

Then we had two freshmen tailbacks -- we brought in three

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freshmen. You guys know Busse (phonetic) that came in in the spring and had a heck of a spring. Going to be a really good football player. We had two young ones. One came in with a PCL, ligament damage, and had surgery in high school while he was still in school and he's a little bit behind in rehab so he'll probably be out for the year I'm assuming, and then Synkwon Smith, our other tailback, he's also out for the year right now, which led us to bring in another tailback.

You guys probably don't know Jalynn Williams who's a really good back. We're excited to have him. He's, again, another Western Carolina guy. Got him at a late point, but I think he's a really good back. He's a bit back. We kind of wanted the Derrick Davis, the Daniel Carter big back type of guy, so he's a big tailback. But if you put on some tape of him, this guy can make you miss, he changes directions well, he can catch the ball out of the backfield, which you guys know we like to throw to our backs out of the backfield. This guy can do it all. I'm excited about him. He'd probably be more prepared to play this year as opposed to some of the other freshmen coming in because again, he knows the offense from the knowledge of Cade Bell and what they did down there, so he was a great addition.

We're going to see how he is live. I thought he did solid today. Watch the videotape. But we're excited to have him as well. So that's kind of the 85 scholarship talk a little bit there.

**Q. What are your early impressions of this O-line?  
You have three transfers; should be a different look?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I felt really good coming out of the spring with Keith and Stanley and then obviously Percy. All three of those guys are going to play a lot of football for us. Right now Percy and Keith are starting at left and right tackle, so those are the replacements there for two injured guys a year ago.

We know Branson didn't play and Jacoby came back but didn't play much. Those three guys, I don't care who starts, so we're much better that way. Then on that right side with BJ, BJ Williams and Ryan Baer has had an unbelievable -- that guy looks great. He's leading. It's just another year. But Baer looks great, BJ looks great, and Lyndon Coop is a leader for us up front.

**Q. You said the defensive line is better. What have you seen from them in the spring?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, Jaeden Moore, I've talked about him in the past, he came out of spring ball as a guy that can be a starter for us. If he continues to do what he did in

the spring and puts 25 practices together this fall, he'll be special, I think, to add with Jimmy Scott.

But I just think inside -- we've got five guys inside with FitzSimmons, who we know stays healthy early in camp -- he was outstanding near the end of the year. Francis Brewu, Nick James has played a lot of ball for us. Francis, "Ghost," Isaiah Neal is like 260 pounds right now. He's about 20 pounds heavier than he was a year ago. He's got a great attitude. He always plays with a motor. He's going to be a different guy for us. So we're excited there.

Then going back to the defensive ends with Jimmy and Jaeden, you've got Blaine Spires, you've got Nate Temple, you've got Joey Zelinsky. Crothers had a heck of a spring as well. We're excited about all those guys. Crothers can play inside if we need him. I think he's big, strong, uses his hands well. That guy might be an elite 3 technique one day, too. He can do it all.

**Q. Talk about your secondary heading into this spot, looking at the returning guys, some of the portal decisions and the overall decisions and makeup of that group?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, right now you've got Battle and Tamon Lynam starting at the corner spot, but you've got guys behind him. Shadarian Harrison, most improved player from the spring, nicknamed "Drip." I'm not sure why it's Drip. Because I guess he's got a lot of Drip.

Rashan Murray is a guy that came into the spring. Shoot, in the indoor facility he had a one-handed interception. It was like, holy cow, that was big-time; that was NFL style there. Then he got hurt the next day so he didn't get to finish. I think he must have lasted four or five practices. He was just starting to come on. He had a great summer.

I got Eli and some of the offensive guys telling me how well he's doing this summer. It'll be fun to watch the tape today, which I have not yet, and just see how he progresses.

But with Battle, Lynam, Drip, Rashan Murray, and then Shawn Lee, kid from Harrisburg, true freshman, he's got some stuff to him. He isn't the biggest guy in the world, but he's got som stuff to him. Nigel Maynard, we're looking for big things this spring as well.

Zion Ferguson, a kid from North Carolina that transferred in here, excited about what he's going to do. Just learning a defense that's new to him. But I feel like we're good at the corner spot.

Then at safety we've got Brookins and Javon McIntyre to the field with Kavir Bains. Jesse Anderson is into the



boundary. We've got a kid named Cole Woodson who looks beautiful out there. He's a track guy, can run. He's 205, 206 pounds. He looks like Donovan McMillon did in his fourth year of college football. Then Josh Guerrier, another safety.

Again, I love our depth. We'll go back to the first question about just the transfer portal and keeping our guys. Two years ago -- like our roster got better a year ago. This year because of the transfer portal -- there's always the negatives of the portal, but to me it's been a positive, the portal. We're retaining our players, and players that aren't playing are leaving, and we're getting in new players and we're making good decisions on those players. When you bring in three transfer offensive linemen and you're excited about all three of them and they're going to play for you, we got better. When you bring in three D-linemen that can come play for you right now, you got better.

We're not making mistakes, and that's critical. The transfer portal you can make some mistakes and make your team worse. We've done a great job evaluating, getting the right people and the right athletes that fit, and then obviously our coaches do an unbelievable job of coaching and teaching them.

**Q. I think last year at this time there was a lot of internal believe that Kyle Louis was going to be Kyle Louis. How has he taken all that in stride and how has he carried himself this year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We'll find out. We'll find out come 30 days from now on the 30th of August. We're going to find out -- no different than Des and all those other guys. I think he's done a nice job. You watch him in the weight room, you watch what he's doing there, he's done everything he needs to do. I don't think he's got a fat head. He's a worker.

Anybody can get a fat head. Coaches can get fat heads. Players can get fat heads. But Kyle, he wants to win. All those accolades are great. Win the Butkus Award, that's great. He wants to win an ACC Championship. That's what we strive for.

**Q. Talk about the transfer portal; how do you go about saying you guys have done a good job of getting those guys and retaining your own. How do you go about identifying positions of need and going out and getting those guys and making sure they are the right guys for your system?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, it's putting the work in. It's video work, it's character work, it's calling coaches to find out. But it comes down to you're watching his high school tape,

and maybe you had a previous relationship with him, whether it's MJ Devonshire who came in here a couple years ago where you recruited him out of high school and he goes somewhere else. Donovan McMillon, the same thing. We loved him in high school, so it was a natural. We didn't have to watch a ton of Florida tape, although we did.

The mistakes we've made is when we haven't done a thorough job or we're hoping that he's good enough. But you didn't know for sure.

But all those evaluations, whether you get a guy out of high school or not, those evaluations, you go in and you've got write-ups on the computer on what you saw that day when you went to spring ball. Those are all major, major factors as far as what we saw live out of him in high school. Then you're watching college tape from there, and again, our recruiting office does a great job of identifying and then we do a good job of just looking to see what we need, what's it look like.

We got Tylar Wiltz a couple years ago, like who's this guy from Southeast Missouri. I don't even know if that's his college. I don't know another directional school out there in Missouri. The kid was a great player. I talk about him all the time because he was like, who is this guy. They got some FCS guy. The guy is a great football player, as is Des Reid.

**Q. Who's someone who is maybe not top of the line but you're really excited about that hasn't been mentioned?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Okay, that's a great question. I love those questions here. Guys that you don't -- that we haven't talked about yet today at least, Tony Kinsler. He might have a little strep throat today so he missed first practice, but I think Tony Kinsler is going to be a dude. I think he's going to help us this year somewhere.

I'm trying to think here. Shep Turk has been impressive. We got him at the center position right now, and you never know how that O-line goes, as you guys know, but he's been coming, obviously a T.J. kid, but he's coming. He's been mature. He's strong. He's doing a great job snapping the ball.

I talked about Shawn Lee already. We talked about Cole Woodson a little bit.

The other guy that impresses me just looking at him is John Wetzel. We haven't talked a whole lot about John, was a late addition.



I'll talk to you about transfer portal. We had two scholarships open when we kind of came out of spring ball. We had two scholarships open, and we took Zion Ferguson. We would have liked to have gotten another transfer, but there was no transfers in the portal good enough, okay. That's a fact. It wasn't like we couldn't get three guys. We tried to -- we visited three and couldn't get them.

No, we looked at the portal and there was none good enough, so we went to the next best thing was to go take another great high school football player, and John is going to be -- he's a football player already. I see him out there in special teams drills. He's playing a little safety, playing a little linebacker. He's doing a little bit of both. He's 200 pounds right now about, maybe 199. John Wetzel is going to play a lot of football for us, and he was a late guy that was committed and signed with Marshall, so we're excited about him as well.

But a lot of those young guys I've mentioned already. Let me see if there's some -- I guess the other linebacker that we're not talking about, and right now he'd maybe be the fourth linebacker in is Jeremiah Marcelin. Our team has faith in this guy. He's a physical dude. He's going to strike you, hit you in the mouth. He's intense. He's going to be a fun guy to watch this year on defense.

**Q. What's your thought on the ACC scouting injury reports?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm okay with it. We did it in the past. I don't know if it does anything. I'm not believing them; put it that way. Do you believe them? Guy says he's questionable, says he's doubtful and then he plays. We've seen it all in the past. So I don't know why we're doing it, but we'll do what they ask us to do, we'll follow the rules and get it done.

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