

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: How we doing today? So we close a chapter on Central Michigan last night. Good meeting. Special teams, offense, defense, got all the videotape watched, graded, obviously all day yesterday.

I was happy with the way our guys came to play. We talked about the adversity I told you after the game, happy with that. When you think about just the Mid-American Conference, I told you guys you can get caught. A week ago, Central Michigan beats San Jose State. Ohio versus Rutgers, a week ago. Something I fed to our guys. They trust in what we're talking about, they get it, bought in. 17-31 at halftime, similar score the other day. Final is 31-34, Ohio gets beat to a Big Ten team.

Kentucky versus Toledo, 10-2 at halftime, Kentucky. Ended up being a 16-24 game. Buffalo versus Minnesota. 10-3 halftime. 23-10 game. We could have found ourselves in the same thing.

Akron, 3-0 at halftime. Wyoming beats Akron 10-0. We could have been in that spot. That's what I'm most proud about our guys. They bought in.

Like I said, we've had a detailed group since the spring, fall camp. I mean, they listen. They take coaching. They do what you ask them to do. They did exactly like we as a staff asked them to do.

We direct all of our attention back towards our next opponent. We're excited to get into this week, as you guys all know. We're excited. We're excited about the game that presents itself here.

Rich Rodriguez, obviously a fantastic football coach, been around, won a lot of football games, a heck of a coach. It will be a heck of a ballgame down in that atmosphere in Morgantown. We're excited about that.

Coach Rodriguez calls the plays on offense. He's a dynamic play-caller. Saw him when I was at Michigan. Had a chance to face him when I was at Cincinnati for two years when they were a top-10 football team with Slaton,



who is on their staff now, and Pat White who is on the staff now. I think Schmitt is the only guy they haven't hired, but will probably bring him back this week.

Schmitt was a guy, for some of you young people, used to smash his helmet against his head, kind of like Devin Danielson, but he drew blood. They were unbelievable. Great teams back in the day. I know that's what Rich is trying to get back to, having that type of football team.

Again, offensively Nicco Marchiol is obviously starting quarterback. They'll play three quarterbacks, not like last week. He does a fantastic job.

The other guy, take notice, is Cam Vaughn. Their wideout, No. 4, a Jacksonville State transfer. As I say the word 'transfer', 14 of their guys on offense, 14 on defense, total 28 transfers in their two deep. With 28 transfers in their two deep, probably maybe two of their best players are two guys from Jacksonville State that Coach Rodriguez brought with him from down there.

No. 4, we have to know where he is. Obviously Jahiem White is a player. Their tight end Grayson Barnes, I think four catches, a guy we have to know where he is, play-action pass, all that.

The defensive coordinator is Zac Alley -- Allen. Zac does a great job. They're very multiple on defense. Play four down, three down, a bunch of different three down fronts, get into a bear look, do a bunch of different coverages. They've been fun to watch.

The one thing I say about a West Virginia football program is they will be tough and play with great effort. When you put the tape on, you'll see them flying around. They'll play hard. He's got them playing hard, tough and physical. That's what I see out of tape on them.

Open it up with questions.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Again, we say we got four starters, five starters, whatever. You can talk ones and twos. The majority of that game we played with maybe if you want to call them backup corners. I thought both of them did an outstanding job, not only in the pass game but the run



... when all is said, we're done.®

game as well. Obviously things we can clean up. I was happy.

I told you since August, Shawn Lee is a football player. We talked about Drip since spring ball, Shadarian, that is. Those are two really good football players.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Underwhelming? We'll find out this week, right? I think when we start to get into Power Four games, which is what we all want to play all the time, that's when you really find out.

We'll find out when you play better personnel. Like I say, the MAC, no disrespect, they will be a bowl-eligible team this year. Might be in the MAC championship. I think they do a great job coaching, they're detailed. I like what they do. I think they're different. I think that's going to make them win some games in the MAC.

Once you get into ACC play, you get into playing Big 12 teams, they're well-coached, too. Rich is a good coach. Allen is a good coach. They're going to be well-coached. That's when you sometimes can get exposed. We'll find out. Audition number three on the road. We'll find out.

Q. Through the first two games of the season, have you been impressed with how the offense has been able to create length for the running backs?

PAT NARDUZZI: I've been happy. There are some things they did different. You look even last week. You're adjusting on the run. San Jose, they lined up in two fives and a zero. Only on a true, true passing down did they ever get into that same front. Gave us a lot of different looks up front, which is great.

I think our O-line did a great job at figuring all that out. We give up one sack again, two weeks in a row. Find out if we get exposed this week, we'll find out the next week after, that next week after that.

If we can keep that to one sack a game... this year Ryan thought it was a twist going on. I've been happy with him. He thought he overplayed an end going inside, went back outside. That happens. But I've been happy with the offensive line.

Q. For most of your Pitt tenure, you didn't have the Backyard Brawl on the schedule. Three under your belt. What have you learned about the significance of this rivalry?

PAT NARDUZZI: Oh, boy. It's a rivalry. I've been in a lot

of rivalry games throughout my career. It is just another one of those rivalries. It just happen to be Pitt versus West Virginia.

There is a lot of hatred in the game. I think the fans hate each other. I think it goes way, way back. I think there's for whatever reason lots of scars that they have, they haven't got over them yet.

For us as a football team, all the things in the crowd and the stands, what happens when you're driving on the bus, doesn't really matter. It's what happens on that football field that is going to matter. The team that's going to stay focused best on the task at hand is winning the football game. That's what we're going down there to do, is trying to win a football game.

We're not going to get into what the fans felt 35 years ago, 40 years ago. What happens on September 13th will be the key.

Q. Were there things you learned or took away from previous games that you can help this team prepare for?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. Not really. I mean, it's an away game. You got to deal with the locker room situation. Won't be like a home locker room where you have space. Already talked to our guys last night just be prepared for a lack of space, hospitality down there.

Not really. There's nothing we're going to take from the game. I thought we went down and played solid. Came away short last time. Didn't play really good on offense at all. Thought we played really good on defense. We'll take that away. I won't even talk about the last time we went down there. Doesn't even matter. It was two years ago.

I remember it, by the way. I remember it.

Q. You will you take all 105 guys down?

PAT NARDUZZI: We'll travel Friday. Bringing the whole room down, which is what we normally do for a rivalry game. I want everybody to be there, be a part of that.

Q. You talked to us last week ahead of Central Michigan, sometimes you go into a game you end up losing to a perceived inferior team, can be a wake-up call. West Virginia comes off a loss. After losses like that, what can be the determining factor for a team? Are you able to grow from it or it makes you spiral?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'd say West Virginia, they a tough loss. They will be prepared. Rivalry will get them prepared.



They'll have a week of practice. We'll get their best game, like we always do. They'll be intense, tough, physical, they'll play fast. That's what we expect.

Whether they won or lost, I'm expecting the same thing. I think we'll face even an angrier team, angrier fan base.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: You're talking our team going down there and feeling like that?

Q. Yes.

PAT NARDUZZI: No, we won't have that problem. That won't be a problem here.

Q. Through a couple of games, how similar are West Virginia to what you've seen from Rich Rodriguez? Are there changes from last time you faced him?

PAT NARDUZZI: He seems very similar. I'm sure all the terminology has changed. He's very similar. Not that we know any of the terminology. He's been a couple places since he got this.

Just what they do is very similar to what we faced for three years at Michigan State when we faced him. '8, '9 and '10, I think, in those games. Very similar. Different personnel, different things that they had strengths at. They had Denard Robinson back in the day, Tate Forcier. Obviously gone back and watched all those games during the summer and last night.

They had really good talent. They were really good up there. We'll be ready to roll.

Q. After watching the tape, what did you like or what stuck out about Mason's series at the end of the game?

PAT NARDUZZI: He put it in the end zone at the end, like he did the week before. He needs to get reps. He was very efficient. He had to put less air on that one pass over the middle to Max.

You tell me your impressions. But you look at a really sharp, young freshman coming in with poise. Didn't see a rookie moment out of him really. Made good decisions. Got rid of the ball one time when he got pressured.

You just see a guy that's far beyond his years.

Q. (Question about wide receivers.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Been happy. Obviously Poppi has had a heck of a year so far. Got to keep that going. Kenny continues. Couple times we wanted more targets for him, we didn't get him the ball for whatever reason. But Kenny has been outstanding.

Blue got the ball in his hands one time. I think he had a couple catches as well. I've been happy with that whole crew. Zion has been coming in, had two catches as well. Doing your job, executing, that's what we ask. They were solid.

Q. You said you'd like to see Kenny get the ball more. When Eli is being as productive as he is...

PAT NARDUZZI: Does it matter? Doesn't matter. There were some targets we wanted to get to him, he was open, we couldn't get it to him for whatever reason. That happens in a game.

When you watch the videotape, you kind of go, We had a play for Kenny there. Again, there's some tags where you're trying to get a ball here and there. We've got to find a way to get it to him as much as the other guys in that room.

Again, Eli is doing a good job sitting in the pocket, finding the right guys. He's been patient. He looks like a different guy in the pocket compared to what he looked like a year ago.

Q. Ja'Kyrian Turner, what are your impressions on him?

PAT NARDUZZI: I told you the 'Boose was going to get loose. It was fun to get him some reps out there, see what he's got.

I think he can help us this season. I don't anticipate him redshirting. That was like his first scrimmage because he didn't get a jersey scrimmage this August. It was good to get him out there, get him some game time.

He had a big smile on his face after the game, having a chance to get in the end zone in the first game he ever played in. I think that's neat.

He ran well, did like we kind of thought he might.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: We prepare like everybody's playing. I'm going to see if I can get Jerry hooked up, see if he'll call down there and see if he can find something out.

We prepare for everybody. He's their next tailback, Jahiem. The next kid in there is really tough. What's his name? On defense here. What is his name? I love him. Play-action, man. A 5'9", 194-pound guy. Play-action, No. 27. A physical dude. I can see why Coach Rodriguez likes this kid as their number two tailback. Obviously Jahiem has a little bit more juice, but this guy has a different pace.

Looks like Skattebo, is that his name? A physical dude.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Oh, boy. A bunch of things. I mean, when you look at where they are defensively in the country, red zone defense I know is really good. Red zone, they're darn good there. Pass efficiency. They're 38th in the country, better than we are. They're going to mix it up. That's what they do well. They're going to try to trick you and put themselves in a good position.

I think they do a great job just changing things up and giving you different looks, try to confuse your offensive linemen and running backs and everybody else.

Q. Has anything over the first eight quarters coalesced further down the tracks than you anticipated in a positive light?

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. Not really. Gets hard because I probably should ask you guys that. What has underwhelmed you guys? What have you been happy with?

But nothing's underwhelming and nothing is like, Wow, I can't believe we're good at this or that. I get to see them every day. There's not surprises because we get to open up presents every day under the tree when we watch our guys play, try to get lined up and make plays on all three phases of the game.

Nothing really surprises me. Again, maybe some things surprise you guys. But I've seen it for a while now.

Q. Do rivalries feel or look any different in this era of player movement?

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say probably. Again, it's not going to be any different for the guys in this room, whether they played in this game before or not. I'm going to educate them on what a rivalry is, what it's going to be like. I'm sure Coach Rodriguez will do the same thing. He's been there before, too.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. He's trying to make a play. He's throwing a lot of touchdown passes, too. He's been really good. He's not going to be perfect. Would I like him to be perfect? Yes. But there's a lot of other things.

Hasn't been like, What are you doing? I've seen those, too. I've seen the good and the bad. We've thrown picks in camp. It wasn't like the first two interceptions he's thrown on the year.

He knows. He kicks himself in the butt. He knows. He takes accountability for it. Rather have them then than this weekend, for sure.

Hopefully we protect the football, because the game of football is the ball. Got to protect it.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Happy. Wouldn't be our starting quarterback... We're happy with him. He's going to be in the pocket, he's going to scramble. It's so hard. I always talk about the clicker. Easy to sit with the eye in the sky, pull that clicker, rewind it, draw on the screen. You should have stayed right there. You could have stepped up in the pocket a little bit. Wasn't a real big pocket.

Those are decisions that guys with athletic ability, they got to go do what they got to do. I think if you start telling them to stay in the pocket all the time, we'll lose who he is, right?

He likes to get out of the pocket. He likes to step up in the pocket. I think he does an unbelievable job of running and throwing it, draws people up, throws it behind them. That's what he shows every day in practice, that's what he does.

He steps up. He's going to get out. I think as a defensive guy, we're always looking to find out what is that quarterback going to do. If he always steps up, we know that's going to happen. Does he always scramble?

Two weeks ago we had a quarterback from Duquesne, wherever he was, this dude spun out every time and ran backwards to his left about 20 yards. He did it in the game. But we knew that going in. We're like, Listen, if you're end or linebacker blitzing off, that guy is going to duck out, spin out, get real deep. We practiced that.

But where does Eli go? I don't know. We'll always have defensively a little scatter where he's going. We'll know exactly where they're going. We want to know do we bring pressure to that side, pressure to that side, bring it up the middle? What does he do?

I don't know if you can say he does anything a lot. He's a



football player. I think quarterbacks with instincts make plays. You don't want to coach against that.

Q. Your defense has one takeaway through the two games. Just opportunities there they're not capitalizing on...

PAT NARDUZZI: We dropped one in the opener. We should have had that one. We dropped one in the opener. But the opportunities really haven't been there, in my opinion. Opportunities is when the ball touches your hands. Maybe we could have had another one this weekend, I forget. But the opportunity's got to be there. That will happen.

I mean, you look at a year ago, shoot, we didn't have any sacks. I think we came out of Kent State with zero sacks. Teams are trying to get the ball out really quick, trying to be safe, do different things. All depends on what they're doing.

Last week it's hard to get many fumbles because they're packed in the box. Running backs running through with two hands like Larry Csonka back in the day. We're trying to push balls out. They're not coming out.

We've had a couple opportunities on quarterbacks that we'd like to get the ball out, too. That's something we work on a lot. I think we'll see what happens the rest of the season. I think our defense is one of the best at trying to get the ball out right now that I've been involved with in 10 years here at Pitt.

Q. You mentioned the rivalries are different now. This is the fourth year where you've played them. Will you do anything to educate the newcomers in this or let the guys that have been in this game...

PAT NARDUZZI: No, Bostic is not getting up to say a few words. Our guys know. They don't need Bostic coming in and talking about the old heydays. They know what it's about. They've heard enough. I'll say a few words. They'll know after I get done. That's about it.

It's about preparation, guys. It's about staying in the same routine. This game is no bigger than the last two. This game is not very big if we don't win last week.

They continue to get bigger as you go on. I mean, another two weeks, we'll have a different team in front of us. It's about the preparation. It's about Pitt and how we execute and practice this week. That's what I want to see.

Q. Back at media days you spoke about wanting to make this rivalry an annual thing again. Has there

been any progress on that here on the eve of game week?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we'd like to see obviously the game be played. I think it's going to pick up in '28 or '29. I thought it was '29. It's going to be a while since we play them again.

I think there's nothing I can do about it. I'd like this game to be played. I'd like to play Penn State. I'd like to play any rivalry game. Just having that on our schedule is a lot of fun as a coach and a player. It's great for the fans.

Q. (No microphone.)

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, again, I don't want to speak for Allen, but I think our athletic director has reached out to them and they already got it filled up, which means maybe they didn't want to play us. I don't know. They filled it up. I know if we knew that was going to happen, that would be our first call.

Whatever. Can't do anything about it. Stay in my lane.

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