

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference



PAT NARDUZZI: All right. Really good productive meetings last night with our team and closed a chapter on that BC game. And the immediate attention goes to really talented Florida State football team that's obviously been tested with Alabama, Virginia, and, of course, Miami this past weekend. So they're really good.

But just hitting on the BC game, which I don't feel any different than I felt after the game, it was a complete game by our football team, kind of what you've been expecting and wanting.

I think we executed at a high, high rate. And that's probably why the score looked like it did. I think when you execute and don't turn the ball over, good things happen.

And our offense had a chance to get almost 90 plays and our defense is on the field for 60 plays. That's kind of how you'd like it to be.

I talked about the yards per carry and yards per pass last week and said, we didn't have enough plays, when you have more plays and you move the sticks like we did, again, our goal was to make an impact and play a complete game. That's what our guys did.

But again, going right on to Florida State. Mike Norvell, heck of a football coach. Has had success wherever he's been. In the offseason made two coordinator changes and obviously some other staff changes, and I think it's made a difference.

He's got guru Gus Malzahn, who we all know is a really talented former head football coach, several places. Does a nice job. They're the number two rushing offense in the country. They're talented. They've got running backs and skill everywhere.

And defensively Tony White old Syracuse coordinator, I think back 2021-2022, has done a nice job, moved around. He's done a nice job on defense.

Starts up front with those guys. Their front four are

fantastic, you can call them fantastic four. They put pressure on the quarterback. We've got to be good up front this weekend and they've got skill all over the field. They're exceptionally athletic.

Q. The defense, Florida State, what have you seen about -- anything that stands out to you, anything that changes (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think maybe surrounded with a lot better players than when he was back at Boston College. The talent surrounding him, the weapons he's got -- 6'7" receiver, he's got a 6-foot-6 wideout that is going to call it run-it routes, he's gonna run a comeback, he's going to get thrown back-shoulder fades at 6'6". We don't have any 6'5" corners. He's really talented. He's got great eye/hand coordination, makes tough contested catches.

He's got talent around him. His athletic ability hasn't changed. He was athletic and scrambled all over the place in the past. He's doing the same thing. He can make plays with his feet. They like to run quarterback draws with him, so we've got to be really ready for all the quarterback draws that we'll see. And obviously trying to stop the slew of running backs they have in the backfield that are big and athletic.

Q. What have you seen out of Mason that tells you he'll be ready for that environment and be able to handle the environment you guys are walking into?

PAT NARDUZZI: We'll find out this weekend, right? We're going to find out. First time starting last week in a college atmosphere. Now it's going to be an angry, enthusiastic crowd down there in Tallahassee. We'll find out.

But kind of like Trey Butkowski, another freshman playing for us. I think he's kind of like this. But it's not going to be how he handles it. It's going to be how we handle it. It's going to be getting the snap -- we had zero unforced errors on offense as far as penalties. I think we had four holding calls, but aggressive penalties.

So that will be the challenge. We've got to do a great job as a staff this week of just making sure that we are on top of our game there and we execute as a high level that way.

Q. You can see his athletic ability in his high school

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tape. He can run, throw, all that. You talked after the game about his preparation. What are those other things beyond the athletic ability that sets him up for success and should help him when he goes into a tough environment?

PAT NARDUZZI: Obviously intelligence and preparation are probably one of the key ingredients. You can be a lesser talented player -- we've got a lot of talent in that quarterback room -- but just the preparation is really good.

But he's got a quick release. He knows where to go with the ball. He's got a good pre-snap idea of what's going on. So that intelligence there helps.

Q. Where's Eli (indiscernible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: Eli's in a good place. Nobody's happy, including myself. It's something you don't want to ever have to do. But it's part of the game of football. It doesn't matter if you're a corner, safety, linebacker or quarterback or running back, I mean, there's adversity that hits.

I think he's dealt with adversity well, and he continues -- he'll have to continue to do -- we're going to need him.

Q. Why was it important to get him in in the fourth quarter?

PAT NARDUZZI: Why was it important? Based on the score, I wanted to get his confidence back where it was and just get him going. It was real important to get him -- you never thought you would get in going into an ACC contest like we did. But we were fortunate to be able to get him in there and get him some snaps because there's still a lot of trust and faith in Eli Holstein, I guarantee you that.

Q. The offensive line (indiscernible), what do you think went differently against Boston College to allow you to find momentum on the ground?

PAT NARDUZZI: Anytime you throw the ball effectively it opens up the run game. We talk about taking what they give you, when you're throwing completions and they have to worry about defending both -- I talk about it all the time, you're being two dimensional.

We ended up being two dimensional on offense. Anytime you can be two dimensional and you're not -- you're not getting a box packed because they don't think you can hit an open receiver or complete it, I think that's what it comes down to.

Q. (Indiscernible)

PAT NARDUZZI: Ryan, Ryan, left guard. Ryan did well. I mean, again, everybody played pretty well when you beat a team like that. That was a really good Boston College team, guys. The score didn't look like it. And you're like we beat -- but that was because of execution and the ball.

And when you don't turn it over, like I said, I think that's a really good football team that's going to win some games this year. They're talented.

It's one of those days where we really executed. We need to bottle everything we did last week and bring it down to Tallahassee.

Q. You made an emphasis on depth. Depth was a little bit challenged on the offensive line and defensive end due to injuries. What were your impression of how those guys had to step up?

PAT NARDUZZI: They played good enough to win. They played good enough to win up front. It's the next man up, whatever it is, whenever it is. Our guys came in and Jia Cooley got some snaps at right tackle as well. It was good to see an Erie boy, Erie, PA guy, get in there. He's only going to get better with more snaps if we can afford to give them to him.

Q. A start like that for Mason, especially first career start, maybe get a little too high on yourself. How has he stayed level-headed this week so far?

PAT NARDUZZI: This week so far, it's Monday morning at noon. All the quarterbacks are in meetings, watching tape now. So they're all in there. It's not like I pulled him in and said, hey, how are you doing? Are you high? Are you low?

Like, I try to teach our whole team: You can't ever get too high, can't get too low; you've just got to stay in the middle. I think that's where Mason will be regardless of what I say to him or what he feels like today.

Q. The (inaudible) quarterback in this point in the schedule as opposed to later, (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm not worried about when. I'm not worried about the last three games. I couldn't even tell you. I know we play Miami at the end. I couldn't tell you who we play game 10 or 11. I know we finish with Miami.

I know we started up with Duquesne and Miami on the lineup, I remember that. But I'm not worried about what game it is.

It's important for our football team to just give us the best



chance to win, and who can go out there and execute and help us win.

Q. This is your first Power Four game (inaudible). Does it feel good to get the monkey off your back?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, not really. We were close to getting a few last year at the end of the year, and we didn't finish for whatever reason. There's multiple reasons.

I didn't see any monkey on my back. I didn't look to see if he was there or not. I would have got him off a long time ago if I could.

Q. You used Isaiah at defensive end on Saturday. What went into that move, how did he do, could that be a long-term switch for him?

PAT NARDUZZI: It could be a long-term. Ghost is a guy, Isaiah Neil, Ghost, nickname aka, Ghost is a guy that plays with a great motor. He's very detailed. He's smart. That's why he's a personal protector on our punt team. He can execute everything we need him to execute.

He's kind of a tweener, between a defensive end and D tackle, especially this week with the mammoth guys that we're going to play up front, 6'7", 330 pounds. Across the board, they're huge. But he's tough enough to play inside, and he's athletic enough to play on the edge. So he's one of those guys that can play both.

Q. Best game for your defense this season, (inaudible) could you say that?

PAT NARDUZZI: You could say that. You know, you could say that. Again, it comes down to execution. I think the main thing was time of possession. When you've only got 60 plays, 65 plays, whatever it is, that's a normal game.

When you're playing in the 90s, there's going to be a lack of execution. There's going to be exhaustion that comes in, whether you go over time or don't go overtime.

Complementary football, offense staying on the field, executing moving the sticks, which is critical, and giving our defense a break.

Then you would have more energy for the 60 plays. If you need to tap out in 60 plays, then we've got conditioning problems, which we don't.

Q. Kincaid (phonetic) said in the past that he wants to lead the nation in first downs, you guys had 31 first downs, might be the most in a game since he's been here. Was that kind of -- use the tempo, they still ran a

lot of plays, picking up the small chunks, moving the ball down the field, is that sort of the offense you wanted him to bring here, something that would just chip away, get down the field?

PAT NARDUZZI: No question about it. Again, moving those sticks, moving the chains. I think our longest drive for points a week ago was two minutes and 31 seconds.

I mean, you look the other day, we had probably four or five drives that were four and a half, five and a half minutes long. And again, the offense is just moving on the field. I always say it's a lot easier to play offense than it is defense because you dictate. Defensively, you're reactors; you have to react to what everybody is doing.

So being able to execute and get the ball out and move the sticks is critical. I don't care if it's explosives. We like to have more explosives.

When you look at it, Boston College had two explosives on the day. Again, two. Our goal was to limit them to five. We're way under that number.

Offensively, we had what we considered 14 explosives. So they're still explosives, but we kept those chains moving, made the chain crew work today instead of just lining them up and leaving them there and then punt the ball.

Q. BC Saturday, surprises (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, there's no surprises in practice because you saw what you saw. You have seen what you've seen since August, since spring ball, since bowl practice up in Michigan. We knew we had something good with him.

But until you see how a guy reacts on game day, I can't tell you he had the greatest scrimmages ever in August when we went to the stadium twice. But he also wasn't playing with the 1 offense either. Being able to play with the 1s and making sure your receivers are where they need to be, those were all factors that we obviously had to factor in.

Q. A decision of that magnitude, at the most important position on the field, how did you go about arriving at that decision? I guess specifically to what extent did you seek out Kade and try to gather input from him or whoever else?

PAT NARDUZZI: We talk every day. We talk depth chart every single day as a staff. It's not just me and Kade. But obviously Kade and I had some conversations, and we'll keep those personal.



But there's a lot that goes into a decision like that. That's not anything. That's hard. That's a hard decision to make. When you look at, Eli is 7-1 as a starter year ago, I think 7-0 as a starter that finishes the game. His one loss was Louisville. He had two drives.

There's a ton of talent there. There's a ton of faith in Eli. But sometimes you get in a rut. And that's what we did.

Q. Six different touchdowns -- six touchdowns against BC six different scores. How important is that for the offense (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's not like we're looking for one guy. I think Poppy (phonetic) was the leading receiver coming into that game probably. Probably scored a touchdown. He was making plays.

And all of a sudden Kenny Johnson gets in (inaudible). I know you guys probably asked the question last week. Kenny had an outstanding game, as you can see right there. He's playing at a high level.

You like these new pictures we've got up here? That's a heck of a caused fumble. We worked really hard on that. It was good to see one of them come out on Saturday.

But you throw it to the guys who are open. You throw it to the guy you're supposed to. It's not like pre-snap you're going I want to throw it to -- you can't predetermine where you want to throw the ball. It can't happen.

Q. When we asked you about (inaudible) Hicks in the past, you talked about, you need to get him the ball in space more and let him make plays. Seems like he's caught some passes down field, and the one came back on a holding call the other day, pretty impressed.

PAT NARDUZZI: He had a nice head sting, too. Better not have any more of that either.

Q. Has he, I don't want to say surprise you, but impressed you with what he's been able to do get as far as getting down field and making these catches, not just the short stuff --

PAT NARDUZZI: No question. You can't play receiver if that's all we are going to do is throw you the ball at the line of scrimmage, see if you can make a play with your feet. We'll put him at running back, if that's the case.

Doesn't shock me at all. Blue (phonetic) is an excellent receiver. I wouldn't brag about him in August camp if I didn't think that guy can make plays down the field as well, if and when he gets the ball in his hands and have space,

make something happen. Whether it's behind the line of scrimmage or ten yards down the field, he can make plays. We have yet to see that, I think, a lot, but he's made some acrobatic catches down the field, which is huge.

To be a complete receiver, you've got to be able to do both. He's one of those guys that I think can make plays with his feet after he catches it, but he certainly, obviously, can catch the ball down the field and make plays down the field.

Q. You went against Alabama (inaudible), what's different about that defense of Alabama versus (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know if you put any tape of Miami Florida Hurricanes. They're pretty good. That was a battle down there in Florida last week and what they call battle for the state championship, I guess, of the Florida teams.

So, I mean, they've been tested. They've played some good football. That's a really, really, really good football team, guys, and we're going to have to play our best to go down there and get a win on Saturday. That's for sure. They're really good, talented everywhere, and they've got great coaches. We'll have to go down and play.

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