

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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## Coach Pat Narduzzi

### Press Conference



PAT NARDUZZI: Close that chapter on week six. Pretty much halftime of the season. Got six in, six to go, regular season. And obviously happy and excited for our kids. Going on the road is never easy against a talented team like Florida State. Great team win, getting everybody in this room, I thought play calling was great. I thought their execution was pretty darned good.

And obviously a lot to clean up. Was obviously happier with the offense than I was with how we played defense. We gave up too many explosives, six on the day and couple that just didn't need to be done. Whether it's pressure, Tamon making the play on the back end. And that last play, that last touchdown, not happy. Again, probably with the play call as much as anything.

But we've got to make a play and play coverage correctly. We didn't play the coverage correctly, we could have been in a different, safer coverage to help our kids out and make them earn it, just make them earn it, which is what we talked about on the headphones prior to. And we didn't do a good job there as a staff.

But happy for our kids. Gotta make more plays. But overall, you go on the road against a really talented football team, as talented as a team as you're going to play against and we got the win.

Obviously on the road again. First night game of the year, 7:30 up there in Syracuse. Fran Brown does an excellent job. I think he's an outstanding coach. Obviously had a heck of a year a year ago.

You see his toughness. Fran Brown is a tough dude, and their team plays tough all the time. They play with great effort. Coach Nixon is their offensive coordinator, NFL guy. I think he does an excellent job. I think they're in the top 10 in the country in passing offense. So they've done a nice job of mixing it up.

Probably come in and be 50/50 against us, we anticipate. And outstanding coach. And Coach Robinson, Elijah Robinson is their defensive coordinator. Great friends with

Fran. Does a great job on defense, place a lot of four down, a lot of man coverage, a lot of zone coverage. Very similar to probably what we are.

Great team and great challenge on the road. Moving on to the next one.

**Q. (Inaudible) three fourth downs. Only done that one other time in your tenure. Was it a matter of trusting Kade, the offense and Mason or more manageable spots?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Manageable spots and manageable down and distance. I think is what it comes down to. If there were six of them we probably would have went for it six times if we felt the need to and felt that based on where the ball was placed, the distance.

Again, we were doing three more, kind of shocked we didn't have more of them. But especially when you have three in the first series, that means we were executing and we were ahead of the sticks. Those weren't fourth-and-10s we were trying to convert. They were manageable. All three of them may have been fourth-and-1s. That's a great job by the offense putting us in a position where you've got four-down territory.

**Q. Last week, Mason's (inaudible). What did you learn about him?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We saw -- we will see and we saw. He's a competitor. He does a great job leading the offense. He wasn't shaken by the road, he wasn't shaken by throwing a pick, wasn't shaken by throwing a second pick. He continues to come back.

He's just got a swagger about him and a confidence that it doesn't matter. Again, different quarterbacks can come in at different times and they throw a couple different picks, and you see they don't react well to it. His face changes. He gets big eyes or different look on his face.

He didn't have a different look. He had the same look that he had on the first series of the game to the last series of the game in that four-minute victory offense.

**Q. (Inaudible)?**



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PAT NARDUZZI: He's had a lot rope from the beginning. He had a lot of rope a week ago. We are going to give our quarterbacks rope. We aren't going to put a guy that we feel is limited and can't do this or that. The playbook is open. We feel we can do anything with Mason.

**Q. [Question about Heintschel]**

PAT NARDUZZI: Not at all. Not at all.

**Q. Of those two interceptions, would you qualify or did you call those (inaudible)? And then the other one, Kenny slipped. When you and Kade and Mason went over it, did you feel like he made good decisions on those throws?**

PAT NARDUZZI: The first one, the punt, he took a shot. And sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. Even on that one, I think it was Blue (phonetic), right? If Blue goes up and attacks the ball, you probably get a PI on it.

But we didn't do a good job. We've got to do a better job coaching what we get on that one.

And the second one was probably a bad decision. You just throw it away if you don't like what you want. Young guys are going to make those mistakes, just trying to make a play. You've got to love his confidence, but we've got to protect the football. It costs you a game.

Again, that second one was after a blocked punt, I believe. And we got a blocked punt, which would have smothered that ball and put it in the end zone and fell on it. But we didn't get a piece of it. We could have executed that a little bit better, so we did get the whole ball.

But we've got no points out of that. We're in field goal range. We've got to be smarter with the football.

**Q. (Inaudible) important plays and such (inaudible)?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Never -- you don't expect that at the beginning. I think we've had a lot of great recruiting classes here and guys that can play. But Shawn Lee has really played well. Mason's obviously played well. Trying to think of some of the other true freshmen -- Busey (phonetic), Busey is pretty good too. We saw Busey in the spring, thought he could be a factor, thought he's got that different gear, kind of like a Dez. He has the ability to break them. And he's shown good bursts. And we're happy with where those freshmen are at this point.

**Q. [Question off microphone]**

PAT NARDUZZI: It's on a weekly basis. If you can't run

the ball and you're being forced to be one dimensional and you have to throw it, you've got problems. Same thing if you can't throw the ball and you're forced to run it.

We want to be two dimensional in a perfect world. It's not always that way and it depends on what they give you. If they want to come out with a three-man front, depending on the coverage, we're going to do what dictates it.

You probably noticed we're a little bit slower. We're trying to get in a good play. And Coach Bell has done a great job game planning. The offense has done a great job game planning and putting our kids in the best position to have success in the run or pass game.

**Q. [Question off microphone]**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I mean, the front four that we played against is pretty massive. I liked what I saw. Guys play with an attitude. Obviously Lyn had the one penalty at the end of the half, which we shouldn't have got to it, but we did. Shoot, the headphones are off. And I'm probably never going to take my headphones off early again.

But I think our offensive line is playing with an attitude. That's what you have to have in this game. You have to have an attitude. They go by "O Block." I think O Block played a darned good game.

**Q. As a defensive guy yourself you look at a guy like Dez what he did through the years. How is what he's able to do, how does that cause trouble with great talents against defenses trying to defend him? How enhanced do you think your offense is by him doing that?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I know what you're playing, coverage wise. And they got into playing some man coverage. And it comes down to game planning and putting your guys in position and getting your tailback in mismatches where they have to run to get him or they lose him. And they're running through traffic to get to the guy.

If you play man coverage you've got to be alert to number 0. And obviously everybody that plays against us, and I think the same thing goes with our other tailbacks -- they'll have opportunities in the pass game if you're running man coverage and we can do a good job in our route concepts. It comes down to route concepts and what coverage you're getting behind it.

**Q. (Inaudible) what was it like to interact in (inaudible) choice of spots?**

PAT NARDUZZI: They responded in the second half, I



think, pretty well. But it's the adversity in the game. We talk about ups and downs in the game. They're going to happen. They're going to happen in Syracuse. There's going to be good plays, bad plays. There's going to be adversity. It's how you react to the adversity that really matters.

I thought our guys hung in there. We talked last night. We're up seven and it's tied. And we're up and then it's tied. And then they're up and we go into halftime down. But our guys bowed up and knew it's a 60-minute game. We came out and played four quarters. We played four better quarters than they did. That's what counts.

**Q. (Inaudible)**

PAT NARDUZZI: We'll see. Last week, yes. This week, do we? We'll find out. I think it's week by week. I was disappointed second half just little technical little things defensively that we didn't do adversity-wise that is a concern that will get cleaned up this week. But guys trying to make plays and start playing outside the box instead of doing their job.

If we just do our job and read our keys, we'll be a heck of a lot better off than -- sometimes we lose our mind and we start to think this play or that play or what we thought they were going to do.

I don't want to hear "I thought." I want to know what your key does and do what he tells you to do. Don't guess. That's kind of what we saw defensively in the second half.

**Q. The (inaudible) touchdown towards the end of the game, (inaudible) what did it look like on film and what did it reveal what happened there and how to prevent that?**

PAT NARDUZZI: It looked bad on tape. It looked worse on tape than it looked in person. Our guys know how to play the certain coverage we were in. We did a poor job of executing.

That comes down to guys making sure where they need to be. And it's the details. It's 60 minutes of details. And we didn't have it on that play for sure.

There was other opportunities, some of the explosive passes, we should have eliminated them. We blitz off the edge, Kyle Louis comes clean. Kyle Louis is going to make that play 99 percent of the time. He doesn't. It's a good quarterback, he's athletic. And he makes us miss and slings it down the field with Kyle still chasing him down.

We knew that was a guy we had to keep in the pocket, still attack in the pocket, and we didn't. It's cover 3 and we're protecting the end zone, and we've got to go make a play on the ball. The ball's up in the air. We have plenty of time to react to it instead of thinking he's throwing it to you and making a catch and a tackle in the end zone doesn't matter. You've got to go get the ball and knock it down or catch it, one or the other.

**Q. [Question off microphone]**

PAT NARDUZZI: No doubt about it. Again, it comes down to they got into a run phase where they wanted to pound it at us with their offensive line, those big, big tailbacks athletic guys that can run.

But it's making them earn it. You have 5 or 6 yards here and there, but the more plays you have on the field, there's more opportunities to make mistakes. I think that last drive is 43 seconds. I kind of went through a drive chart last night with them about the 3- and 4-minute drives made them earn it. And that 43 second drive, we gave it to them. You can't give gifts in the ACC.

**Q. [Question off microphone]**

PAT NARDUZZI: It's hot hand, but we're going to continue to rotate them because they're all capable of making big plays. We'll play to their strengths and get them on the field and keep guys fresh.

**Q. You mentioned Bradley (phonetic). It's a hard-hitting team at Syracuse. They've had to use a couple different quarterbacks, but yet they continue to have success in the pass game. What is it they do schematically that makes them so tough?**

PAT NARDUZZI: They've got base concepts that they've done a nice job executing. They've got great receivers that make plays out there. They've got a lot of targets. They've got a tight end, Villari, that's a player, we know he's a player. He can run with the ball after he catches it.

They've got a good football team. And they've got weapons and they've got good schemes. That's what you need is guys that can make plays and also schemes that can get you open based on what you're seeing coverage-wise.

**Q. How do you feel about (inaudible) tackle?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I thought he did a nice job the other day. For his first true start, he's exactly what we thought. Back in August I told you and Percy (phonetic) were battling it out. And was happy with his performance and it will only

get better.

**Q. The freshmen, you have six guys who currently have played five games. Basin (phonetic) is on his way to burning his redshirt. That's the most since 2020 that you have burning their redshirts. Looking at the coaching staff, five of those guys are offense (inaudible) special teams. What does that say about the assistant coaches, (inaudible) classes, the ability to identify talent that can play right away?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I think again through my tenure we've done a pretty good job. We go back, watch it quite often, back old school, 2015. We've got talent in that room.

I can't say this class is any more talented, but it's opportunities. Right? Dez being out a week, really two weeks, three weeks, whatever it was, seemed like half of West Virginia, all Louisville, all BC, out three weeks pretty much, gave those other guys a chance to grow up.

If Dez is in there, we might not still know what we have because we're still playing Dez. It's opportunity, our guys have run with the opportunity. Just like Trey has at kicker. He's 2-for-2. Another freshman that's making an impact in the game. I think Trey's only missed one field goal in the year. That could have been the game winner on the road.

So happy with those guys. We've done a good job recruiting. I can't say it's been any different this year, but sometimes you make mistakes, but it's what we do.

We've done as good a job as anybody in the country as far as developing talent. We've known that. We've talked about that. That's not just a one-year thing, that's an 11-year thing.

**Q. The number of fourth downs we were talking about earlier. It's one thing to go for fourth and one when you're at their 35 or inside their 30, but your first one I think you were at your own 34. Did you come into the game with, I don't know, some extra energy, extra little more confidence, either from Mason or from whatever it might have been? To go for it in that situation, that's a risky play, right?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, it's a risky play. A few years ago, at Virginia in the rain, I remember coming out of the tunnel and you step in a foot of water. I think we went for it on fourth and one at our own 11-yard line. So there's risks and rewards.

We're not playing to tie the game; we play to win. And if we feel good with the match-ups and what we have and who we have, we're going to take those chances. Every

game's a little bit different.

**Q. You're at the halfway point of the season. What do you make of the conference at large? Seems Miami has separated itself. But after that (inaudible) to a good start. It seems that the preseason goals you guys had still seem to be in front of you.**

PAT NARDUZZI: We've known that. You get out of the preseason games and we know that. We gave two games away. We gave one conference game away. But we've got a really talented football team that's fun to watch, I think, in all phases, whether it's blocked punts, return yardage on punts and kickoff, to offense and defense. I think we've got a talented team that's fun to watch, and we'll be at every game the rest of the year. We've been at every game so far. It's not like it's been 38-10 blowouts and we've lost and you're coming in here hang-dogging.

We're going to be in football games; we've just got to take care of the business at hand and worry about being 1 and 0. And what happens in the end will happen in the end, but we've got as a good chance as anybody in the country. We have Georgia Tech coming in here and we've got Clemson. I should say we're going to Georgia Tech and we have Miami coming in here.

**Q. Defensive end, a position pretty disproportionately banged up. How do you make of your depth there and how guys like Isaiah Neal and (inaudible) stepped up?**

PAT NARDUZZI: (Inaudible) has really stepped up a bunch, and the depth is not very good. And that's probably an even more impressive win on the road with four defensive ends. Maybe we travelled on the road with four guys that jump in the game. The depth wasn't good. Guys hung in there. Goetz (phonetic) has done an unbelievable job.

And speaking of injuries, I always tell you if somebody is out for the year. Zach Crothers is out for the year; we won't have him for the remainder of the year. And so is Nigel Maynard, one of our corners, that was just starting to get really good.

I think the week before he had 27 snaps on special teams. Nigel, he came in in spring ball, was playing really, really well. Then in fall camp, he gets a shoulder. And we've got another season-ending injury with him. He was really coming on. We know Crothers was as well. You guys could see that. Defensive snaps. But disappointed to obviously lose both of those guys. But next man up, and there are no free agents. We can't go sign anybody else, at least now, maybe in five years the transfer portal will be open during the season and we will be able to. Who

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knows? But right now the portal is not open.

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**Q. Going to have seasons here. What's been your observations and thoughts on the surface at Acrisure Stadium?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Surface? I didn't get to see much of the game yesterday. I heard a little bit of the noise. But even before I heard the noise, I kind of went into the coaches house, office, said, You see that field?

For whatever reason, I'm not a grounds guy, but I heard some of the noise from yesterday, and I thought the last game was not very good. And I thought it was a little shaky when I walked out there. It seemed dry. I don't know why. It's a drought. I mean, Mother Nature. I don't know what it was.

I know we've got a sprinkler system out there. But it just seemed really dry. And I caught the last two minutes of that Steeler game yesterday and I saw it, I was like, holy cow. I went into LaSalle's office and said, it doesn't look very good out there, doesn't look good.

So hopefully we can get that thing back to where it needs to be a great surface. We love playing on the grass. So we can't change that.

**Q. Your thoughts on what happened yesterday. As a coach, how do you feel knowing Coach Franklin?**

PAT NARDUZZI: James Franklin is a great coach. It's the business we're in. I say "business." It's business. The places have got to do what they've got to do. I'm not concerned about that. We don't play them, and James will be okay. I've got a lot of respect for him. It's a shame because he's a great coach. We all know that. He's won a lot of football games. He was in the playoff a year ago, and then he's looking like he is.

I'm more focussed on Fran Brown and Syracuse Orange and the challenge we have this weekend going up there this weekend in the dome, in a nasty atmosphere.

**Q. Not specific to Coach Franklin, but yesterday the Oregon State guy got let go, Trent Dilfer got let go. Seems this midseason stuff is happening more and more. Is that something you've noticed as you've been in the business, and do you have any thoughts about why this is happening?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I have no idea. Just worrying about winning football games here so it doesn't happen to me. My job is to take care of my job; stay in my lane.

