

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Pat Narduzzi

### Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: I didn't bring any stats in with me, but tough day at the office on Saturday. First, I've got to say again, just looking back, heck of an atmosphere, heck of a day for Pitt, heck of a day for the city of Pittsburgh in general, just having that atmosphere here.

I wish we could have put a ribbon on it at the end with a victory, but it wasn't our day to get that one done, against a really good football team. Got a ton of respect for Marcus Freeman and what they do and how they do it. They've got some really good players, and we just didn't make plays when we needed to; put it that way.

Again, we always talk about 11 guys playing as one, and there's times where if you've only got nine or you've got eight or you've got seven or you've got 11, it's not going to be as good, so 11 guys got to play together on offense, defense and special teams, and we just didn't do that.

We gave them too many short fields. I think three of our their four touchdowns that they scored on our defense, which if you hold a Notre Dame team to 28 points defensively, you feel okay, but it was the short fields. It was a 52, 54, 56, maybe -- I think there was one 65-yard drive. Those are still short drives, but those were all off of kicks and covered on special teams. They got us in that. Again, hat goes off to them.

But we move on to another great game, 7:00, ESPN, down in Atlanta against Brent Key, a great football coach who's done an outstanding job. They might as well just announce him as ACC Coach of the Year. He's done an incredible job. Just give it to him early.

A 9-1 football team, find ways to win in the fourth quarter. Even as soon as I got home, the first thing I did was stick that TV on and watch them against Boston College and watch them just fight back and crawl. They're tough just like their head coach is. He's a tough dude.

If you get to know him, he's smart, tough, and he's got an offensive background. They're the No. 1 offense in the country. Not the No. 2, not in the ACC; they're the No. 1



offense in the country that we've got to go down and face. It'll be the greatest challenge of the year for our defense to go down there and face all the different stuff they do. They're very multiple in personnels, multiple in formations, and just really good.

Their quarterback is special. Haynes King is really good. Transfer from Texas A&M, played three or four years down there or at least was on the team down there. But he's special. I don't listen to the news, but I don't know if he's in for the Heisman or whatever, but the guy has thrown for almost 2,300 yards, rushed for 800. That guy should be talked about for the Heisman because I think he is about as tough as anybody in the country.

There's no question about it. I think you just watch that tape, that guy, he battles. He can do it all. He's throwing the ball a heck of a lot better than he has probably in his entire career. They've done a good job with them. I think Winky is their quarterback coach, and he's making plays all over the place.

The No. 1 key to victory is being able to stop Haynes King.

Questions?

**Q. You've faced a lot of dual-threat quarterbacks over the years. What sets Haynes King apart?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, great question. He's going to carry the ball. He's their leading rusher, okay. The tailback is not the leading rusher; he's the leading rusher. That crazy. I want to say, shoot, 148 carries. I don't have it written down; I didn't bring my stats in here. I want to say he's got 148 carries. That might double any running back carry. I mean, this kid is -- like I've never seen a guy so tough. For a quarterback to play like a tailback and also throw like a quarterback, that's different.

We've seen zone read guys are going to keep it, some protected runs. Even Central Michigan came in here, their quarterback was going to run the ball but not like this. It's all evolved around him and the ball in his hand. He's special, and they're certainly using him to those capabilities.

**Q. What's the key to defending a guy like that?**

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PAT NARDUZZI: You know, I just talked about, probably I've never seen so many formations. They'll formation you to death, so you're working and walking through a million formations this week. But number one thing is to get lined up. Number two is to read your keys, play fast and tackle well. Those are the keys.

That's going to be the key. Read your keys.

**Q. Jeff and Kendall both played left tackle on Saturday? How is Jeff feeling?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Still not 100 percent. We didn't want to wear him out. He hadn't had many game reps. We'll continue to use both.

**Q. How much does a high-level opponent like Notre Dame gear you up for these final two tough ACC opponents?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I think it gears you up. I don't know. You've just got to focus on one game. I don't know if it gears you up or not.

**Q. The defensive line without Fitzsimmons out there, how do you think they handled it?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I think they did a great job. I think Francis Brewu played really well. He played like a man in there. He did well. Jahsear obviously did some things wrong; he was out of his gap at times and doing some rogue things, but I loved his motor. I loved our athletic he looks out there. He looks really athletic out there.

Then Nick James, he always plays well. He gets off the ball. He's good.

**Q. Is there somewhat of a benefit to having a bad taste that they can learn from?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Absolutely. When we come in here on Sundays, it's not to bash them or to -- it is to watch what we did right, what we did wrong and try to fix it. Offensively we didn't convert on a 3rd down, and again, the big problem is against that defense, you get in a 3rd and long, it's going to be hard to get out. We didn't stay ahead of the sticks like we had in earlier games.

You get in 3rd and long, and most of those, it wasn't like it was a bunch of 3rd and 1, 3rd and 2s we missed; it was 3rd down and 5+ I want to say maybe 18 of the 20, whether it was a 3rd or 4th down.

We got unlucky, okay, because the times where we got receivers open, our protection wasn't very good, and then

there's times where the protection was good and we got nobody open. That's a bad combination. Again, talking about the 11, that just didn't match up where we could -- besides us making catches and all that, but as you watch it, now we've got a great pocket and we can't get open, whether it's this, this, this. I didn't say a word.

**Q. To your point about the defense only letting up 28 points to a team like Notre Dame and factoring in the goal-line --**

PAT NARDUZZI: The goal is 21, by the way.

**Q. Sure, but the two interceptions, the house call, the goal-line stop on a long drive, is there anything defensively you liked that can be built on from a performance like that?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Everything can be built on. You look at the three -- the three worst field positions of the day for our defense, we stopped them. They got zero points, okay.

Obviously the pick six, we weren't on the field, so there's a lot to take away there, good and bad. There was good stuff and bad stuff. Unfortunately, coaches sometimes when we're meeting, we focus on the bad stuff, stuff to learn from, but everything is fixable. And again, you'd better play really, really good when you play really, really good teams, and we'll have to play really, really good this weekend, so we'll learn from our mistakes.

**Q. Acknowledging what you said on Thursday about not wanting to feed into undue pressure in advance of that game, especially with the two ACC games coming up thereafter, the flipside of that coin is now, here's where the pressure is. How do you walk that line about not feeding into it but at the same time acknowledging the points you made about the importance of these two conference games?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I'm not a pressure guy. I'm not a stress guy. Our guys are going to approach it just like they did last week, which I don't think it was pressure, and the week before when they went to Syracuse, when they went to Stanford. It's just the same way. We just take it one game at a time and treat everything the same.

The word "pressure" is bad. Our guys know what they've got to do; they've got to go out and win one football game.

**Q. Watching the tape, what did you notice from Mason's performance overall?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Kind of like I talked about, when he protection, he didn't have anywhere to go with the ball.



Obviously a couple times he went to the wrong spot.

But he's going to learn from those things. There's not a quarterback in the country that doesn't go out there and throw it to the wrong spot, read a coverage wrong. There's not one in the country. Even as good as their quarterback was, he had a pick -- we had a pick six, too. That's something to build off of.

That was a heck of a play by Heem, and again, I wish Kavir would have got in the end zone. He's had two nice interceptions this year. We've got to teach him how to score and get another 15 yards and score and really get it done.

Even really good-quality quarterbacks wherever make mistakes, too.

**Q. Even though that was a huge get for you guys, you're seeing his impact. Did you expect that from him, especially the plays that he's been making against some of these harder teams?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We wouldn't have recruited him if we didn't. We wouldn't have recruited Kavir if we didn't think he could come in here and help us. To the extent that he is, did you think that much? Probably not. But you never sit there and say, oh, this guy is going to be a great one and then you're just disappointed. I'd rather be excited than be disappointed. But we're excited. He's done a nice job. He's tough. He's a football player.

**Q. You talked about intangibles with Mason. Are one of those like where he can objectively look at a tape from last week, digest it, be honest about it and move on?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah. He can be honest. He can walk into a press conference after the game, like Mike told me, and say, hey, listen, I didn't play well enough today. He can take that. He doesn't have an ego at all. He's a down-to-earth kid that he understands he can play better just like everybody else on offense and defense and special teams.

I think after a game like that or after any loss, even after wins, you've got to look at yourself. We could win the game by 20, and you're still looking in the mirror to say what could I have done better; I didn't play good enough.

We give grades to everybody. Some guys played winning; some guys played average. Win or loss, we grade our guys and they know what they have to do better to get more reps and help us win. So that's what we need.

**Q. (On the struggles with the running game.)**

PAT NARDUZZI: I'd say especially from Saturday, I'd say the guys who were up front. I think the longest run on the year on that defense if I'm correct is maybe a 12-yard run, so nobody ran the ball on them this year. That's why they put you in 3rd and long and then their 3rd down package. Nobody ran the ball on those guys. You go to the explosive run tape, there were none.

**Q. Unless I missed it, I think Jaeden Moore played a handful of snaps in the first half, Blaine Spires played a handful of snaps in the second half. What were some of the personnel factors with those guys, their workload, and just the first half/second half split?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we talked about that afterward, just maybe -- I think we played three D-tackles, and we played six defensive ends. Maybe we played too much. To me, is it watered down a little bit? We've got to find out who those guys are.

The problem is Coach Daoust is handcuffed because he's got one hand, he's got one hand. This still hurts on this guy. You're trying to piece it together, and it's not as clean and clear as you'd like it to be just as far as the health of everybody in November.

We've got to do a better job of making sure who can -- what you don't want to do is stick a guy out there and then you put a new guy in and he makes the same mistake but the other guy corrected it because he saw it the first time, and then the second time the next guy doesn't get it corrected. So those are some things that we've got to clean up and make sure. But it's hard when you're juggling guys during the week. He practices on Tuesday, he doesn't practice on Wednesday, and you find out things real late. Not good.

**Q. Do you sense any improvements in the offensive line this year to last year?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I'm just trying to compare from last week to this week. But I'll let you know after the season. Depends how many wins you get. If we get more wins, then they're much better.

**Q. Last year you guys obviously built a lot of momentum and then losing happens and then it snowballs and kind of takes over the rest of the season. Here you've won five in a row, you have this loss. I think we even asked the players after the game, how do you avoid hitting that wall, how do you avoid allowing this to snowball again. There's probably no easy answer to that, but what do you do, and do you**

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**feel like your players, having had that experience from last year, they know how it can snowball?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think everybody knows. You've got to come to play every week. You've got to bring your A game. You've got to prepare. You've got to keep the same routine.

I don't worry about snowballing. I don't think you can control that. The other team will make you snowball. You've got to go out and execute and make plays. It just doesn't happen to you, okay. You let it happen.

Our guys are pretty strong. Again, it's my job, if we snowball, blame me, don't blame them. It'll be my fault. They've got to come to play, I've got to get them ready to come to play, and they've got motivated. I think if you can't get motivated to play this game, you've got problems.

**Q. Malachi Thomas, I think that drive at the end of the game was the only time he's played on offense in the last two games. Is he just behind the other two guys? What does he need to do to be more involved on offense?**

PAT NARDUZZI: He needs to practice more.

**Q. How did you feel Sam Carpenter's tackle?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, the tackle was one thing. We watched special teams last night. Watch his burst. I didn't know the guy could run like that. The effort he made to go over and make that tackle was outstanding.

Again, then he's holding on, holding on, holding on for dear life and having guys time to -- that was a gutsy effort by that young man. That's a game-saving -- that's a touchdown if he doesn't do what he does. So we got a pick six, then we had a return for a touchdown on kickoff. That was a big-time tackle. It was a big-time play. Proud of him.

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