

University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: All right. We closed the chapter last night on Georgia Tech. Obviously moving on to the next game. It was a nice win by our guys. Not a surprising win. I think a lot of people were shocked, like, oh, my gosh, what you did.

We have a good football team here in Pittsburgh. Didn't shock me the way our kids played, how hard they played, you know, how physical they played. It was a tough physical game.

We talk about effort and toughness -- our guys maximized that Saturday like we needed to, like we have in the past. Pitt's a hard team to beat. You know I think there's one team that beat us this year, you guys know, a couple weeks ago. But other than that, I mean, you know, I'd like to sit here and say we were a 10-1 football team coming into this, because we didn't, you know, finish a couple games the way we needed to.

And for whatever reason young, whatever. You know, you guys can point to whatever you want to. But still a lot of stuff to clean up from the game Saturday that we'd like to do better. That's a well-coached team and, obviously, you know, a talented football team that will give Georgia all they want this weekend.

Then we move on to Miami. Again, you know, another really good team. A team that is as talented as anybody in the country. Obviously they opened up the season and beat Notre Dame. So we know what that looks like because you guys saw that live here.

So anybody that's beaten Notre Dame, I think you have high, high expectations and respect for. Mario Cristobal does a great job. Offensively, they're talented. They've got former, you know, transfer quarterback, Carson Beck, that makes all the throws. He's smart. They put him in good position to be successful offensively.

Shannon Dawson is the offensive coordinator. And Malichi Toney, I think everybody knows who he is. If you watched any games this year, he's a talented freshman that they



move all over the place, that makes a ton of plays. He can run it. He can catch it. He's got wiggle. He's going to be a punt returner. And he can throw it, too.

So he was a former high school quarterback as well. So he's got a great arm. So they'll trick it up.

And then defensively, there again, they're may be the most talented front four that we've seen, that's including, obviously, Notre Dame. Reuben Bain on one side, Mesidor on the other side. Mesidor played at West Virginia, transferred to Miami. We recruited him out of high school, he visited here from Canada.

But they have two edge guys, and two inside guys are as good as you're going to face, period. We'll have to have a great game plan offensively and try to neutralize the talent they have on that football team. Questions?

Q. You said some people might have been surprised by the outcome on Saturday, but you weren't. Not just the outcome, but the way you started, really just kind of dominating on both sides the first 20 minutes. Did that maybe surprise you a little bit, that you guys were able to be that much in control for the first 20 minutes?

PAT NARDUZZI: What surprised me is we didn't do it for the first four quarters. That's what you know bothers me as much as a coach is, like, okay, if you do that in the first couple of series, I mean, defense was outstanding. And obviously they had to get into pass mode. We didn't work as much pass and all the different things they did out of the passing game.

The focus going in was to stop their run, but the first four series defensively was dominating, which gave our offense some short fields. And offense executed. You know I think in the second half offensively we came out and maybe tried to look for things that weren't there and just tried to extend plays when we should be just doing the same thing you did in the first half, do it in the second half. Don't change your mindset.

And sometimes overconfidence takes you over as players, sometimes and you think that you can just, hey, I'm going to just make some more plays. And just take what they're giving you. I've said that for 11 years here. Talk about running, passing, throwing it deep, throwing it short -- take



what they're giving you. And, again, that's part of growing up and we'll continue to get better there. But no shock.

Q. Two weeks ago, similar position, good opponent coming in, a lot of attention, guys didn't respond maybe the right way going into that game. What did you maybe learn from that experience? And does it help that it's sort of so fresh in the kids' minds that you're not worried about it happening again?

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, I think every week is different. I mean, you know it's a different week and I don't think that the hype of the game or anything like that had anything to do with it. I think it comes down to execution and making plays, calling plays, the whole deal.

It's everybody in this room, when something like that happens good or happens bad. But another noon game on ABC. Louis Riddick is calling the game, so we're happy a Pitt man will be on the game. So I don't know if it has anything to do with it.

Have our guys learned? We'll find out. But I think it comes down to making plays on the field and calling and having a great game plan.

Q. (Inaudible) training camp, but how much does the (inaudible) regular schedule --

PAT NARDUZZI: Preseason we dabbled with putting him in there and doing it, so he's done a little bit of both. I thought he did a really good job with his first start, I believe, at that guard spot. He's versatile, he's smart and he's aggressive. So I was happy with what Kendall did at that left guard spot.

Q. With Jeff back in there starting at left tackle, how would you assess both with left tackle and guard in that game?

PAT NARDUZZI: They were solid. I mean, we've had a rotating door at that left side of the line. I don't know if there's something with the left side last year or this year, where it's the left side. And, you know, we have to keep those guys healthy. And we got a lot of confidence in both of those guys over there.

I think one of the early sacks we took, Persi really had great pass set, and Mason's got to step up in the pocket. He hook off to the left, ran right into where Persi was blocking, but he's got to step up in the pocket.

You look at the sacks that we gave up, one on the running back, three on the O line and two on the quarterback, really just the assessment of those sacks that we gave up. It will

be the same case this week if we don't do the little things right with this front four.

Q. (Inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's a linebacker, so he drops into coverage all the time. You know? I mean he's a linebacker, so anytime it's a drop-back pass and he's not blitzing he's in coverage. That was a major play in the game executed exactly the way you're supposed to do it.

Again, a little tweaking by our defense staff, really on Thursday or Friday, just doing the right things and putting our kids in position to make plays.

Q. (Inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: Again, I can't help what the media says. I know we've got three dudes playing linebacker. And they're all good. It's a matter of just making your plays when they come to you. And that's all you can do as a linebacker or defensive end, make the plays that come to you.

But Braylan has been great all year. In my opinion he's an all-conference linebacker, not just because of that pick. He could have not had that 100-yard return, which I think, Mike told me, it's the first time since 1908, the 100-yard, longest one we've had.

It was a special play. It was an explosive play. That guy can run. And he's got great hands and should have had another pick against Stanford. If you guys recall, the first series of the game, it was an easy one he could have caught but was looking to run. But he's a great player. I don't worry about what everybody, who is talking about who. But he's a good football player.

Q. I was going to ask you about that play, too. In that delta package you like to bring pressure, you like to show pressure and then drop out of it. With Georgia Tech, with the way you guys were aligned there, would Georgia Tech have thought your tendency was for Braylan to blitz on that play? Is that what the tendency would have told him?

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say the tendency, but not all the time. I mean, I don't know what their stats looked like but I know what we do in practice and what you get to call, what you don't get to call, what checks we make on defense.

He might have been supposed to blitz that play but did we check something? Nobody knows. We've got different ways of getting stuff based on backfield sets, tight ends, formations based on what we think that they like to do. I

mean it comes down to the game plan. You don't treat everything the same; they have tendencies too. We play off people's tendencies.

Q. Talked to Mason a couple weeks ago, just asked him about maybe why he thought he was under-recruited in Ohio and in high school. What (inaudible) maybe a little apples to oranges, I think had some more Power 4, attention but certainly wasn't at the top of anyone's recruiting list coming out of Florida. I'm curious what you recall from his recruitment, him getting on your radar and what attracted you to him on the recruiting trail?

PAT NARDUZZI: What attracted us, just his athletic ability. I mean there's a lot of good skilled guys across the country. Some people miss some people don't. But obviously great recruiting evaluation does -- nothing stands out. I mean, just doing your evaluation and knowing that you got a guy that can run the football. He can catch it out of the backfield. And he's pretty fast.

I think he was 20, 21 miles an hour probably on that run with the GPSes on game day. You probably see, it probably will pop up on the TV there. There it is right there. What's it 20-what, .97, top speeds? So it gives you a little idea of is the speeds -- I don't know if you guys ever noticed those speeds there.

But he was moving. And, again, just something we saw on tape. I mean, it's called evaluation and no different than Mason or tailbacks or Shawn Lee. Just football players.

Q. Having Cruce back for the first time in a couple weeks after that injury, had some great physical plays out there. How much of a tone setter is he out there, defensively, for you guys?

PAT NARDUZZI: He's a tone setter. He's a little rusty in coverage at times. The umpire did a great job picking him that one time, but he knocked the umpire over on a touchdown pass. I don't think it's going to be a touchdown pass if he doesn't get in our way. You hope umpires get out of the way so you can do your job, not just stand there watching the game. You've got a good ticket, but they've got to get up and out of the way.

Cruce is a tone setter. I mean he's a football player. He'll be better this week than he was last week.

Q. I know when we talked to you a couple weeks about the tiebreaker, you said (inaudible) all the permutations whatever. Do you pay any -- will that be shown anywhere in this facility, like, what has to happen for you guys to make the ACC championship

again?

PAT NARDUZZI: Nothing matters, except a win on Saturday at noon. Nothing matters. We can't control what other people do. We could have controlled it earlier in the year in one of our other ACC games, but all we can do is control and focus on one thing. We start worrying about other things out there, it doesn't matter. It won't be talked about, it won't be addressed, it will be worrying about another football game.

Q. Does it make it better sort of the other games that might factor into whatever happens for you guys post-Saturday being later in the day?

PAT NARDUZZI: I didn't even know they were late in the day. Wouldn't matter if they play at noon like we do or play at 10:00 p.m., we've just got to take care of business, that's what it comes down to.

Q. Given the way you guys work, just as a coach, do you think you have opportunities to get a big win (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's really rewarding. You think about just the belief in this room, of knowing that we can do whatever we want to as long as we execute and take care of the details. Probably the biggest thing is we protected the ball. When you don't turn the ball over and you end up being plus 2 on the road in that environment, that wins you football games. And so it comes down to execution, if you protect the ball, you'll have a chance to win every game, period.

And that's what we did on Saturday, which was most impressive, but it's obviously satisfying for our guys in this room, I'm happy for the guys in this room because they needed that. They worked hard last week to get it and played their tails off on Saturday.

Q. The pair of field goals that Sam missed approaching halftime, did it strike you more as just nerves in that situation, or was there anything procedural, approach technique-wise, there?

PAT NARDUZZI: Nothing procedurally. I mean, I think you can look at the laces. You can look at high snap or whatever it may be, but doesn't matter. Those are all good excuses. Our job is to put the ball, if you're the kicker, through the uprights. And that was obviously disappointing.

Even our punt game was disappointing when you look at some of the probably some of the most disappointing things, we kicked two out of the end zone. When we're



back up, we don't put the ball where we want it. We don't hit bombs when you can hit a bomb. And when you've got to be more precise with where that ball lands in the punt game, you put it in the end zone and we don't get a chance down inside the 10-yard line, which is our goal when we are doing some of those pooch-punt situations.

But going back to Sam, there was nothing procedurally that caused us to miss those field goals. Is it the mental part of it? Is it the physical part of it? Is the environment part of it? I don't know.

Q. Looked like he got hit on the leg on the first attempt. Was he in pain?

PAT NARDUZZI: I don't know. I don't think so. Not enough that he didn't go out there and try to kick the second one. If he did, he can lay down on the ground I'll come out there check make sure you're okay. And we'll put Junko in the game.

Q. You were pretty blunt in your assessment, your own assessment of the fake punt call on Saturday night, taking responsibility. When you watched that back here on Sundays, when you look back on tape maybe if you had blocked it up right you would have had a chance --

PAT NARDUZZI: If we don't fall down, we're probably going to take the corner. So if you watch it close enough we're going to get around the corner. I'm always going to take responsibility. When we lose a game I take full responsibility for a loss, even though I don't make a tackle or I don't run or catch a ball.

I made the call, with Coach Bro together, like we do everything. If he didn't want to run it, I ain't going to run it. He's got to feel good about it. I have to feel good about it in the situation.

And we're playing to win. We're going to be aggressive. It's no different than throwing the ball and taking a shot, whatever it is, or that blitz that we ran down on the goal line and Lovelace goes 100. If that could have been a touchdown you guys would be sitting there second-guessing that again.

I'll take responsibility. If it stinks and it doesn't work, it's my fault, period. I've got no problem with that. That's why they call me the head coach, but I don't second-guess it. If it works, it's great. If it doesn't, it doesn't. And obviously I wish it would have been successful, but whatever.

Q. What I was kind of getting at was more the response of the kids. When you watch it back on tape,

are they, like, ah, Coach, we had it there for you? Or do they sort of embrace that sort of aggressive --

PAT NARDUZZI: They wouldn't want to run a fake all season. They want to play, too. They want to go make plays. It's just one of those ones that didn't work. But they get it. They understand. We're making calls. We're trying to win.

So they know I'm not sabotaging the special teams unit. They know I'm not trying to throw the game. I didn't have a bet on the game. They know we're all trying to win. It comes down to sometimes calls. Sometimes it comes down to execution. Sometimes it comes down to both. And that's the game of football.

Q. Against Notre Dame, you talked about how, like, they had a decided advantage in the trenches hear you're talking about Miami saying they're maybe better up front defensively. How do you, what gives you confidence that your line will be more up to the task this time than they were before?

PAT NARDUZZI: Comes down to execution and great play calling. And that game could have gone a whole different way. You think about just that first series, how we went down the field.

It comes down to confidence and momentum. It's not a matter of the Jimmies and the Joes. It's a matter of going out and executing. I don't care who -- you can put the 1974 Dallas Cowboys out there with Tom Landry, we can -- if we execute and make plays, then you have a chance to move the ball, both sides. You've got a chance to be successful, period.

I've got a lot of faith in the guys in this room that can go out and win a football game any weekend against anybody.

Q. (Inaudible) this year, but the past two weeks (inaudible). Why do you think those guys (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think the last three weeks we've had touchdowns on defense, right? You go back to Virginia a couple years ago, the first two plays of the game, I think 17 seconds off the clock, we got two pick-sixes. That's kind of what we do.

Our job on defense is to not only to stop them but to make plays and get the ball back to our offense or score ourselves. It's kind of what we do. It's part of our package. It's part of what we do. We try to confuse the quarterback and try to get them to throw to us.

That Kavir interception was big time. Shoot, the one

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

against Notre Dame was big time. I wish we would have got into the darned end zone and not just got three points out of it. I guess we've got to work more score drills with our DBs because our linebackers got that figured out. But it's kind of what we do.

Q. (Inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: Coaching this entire team this year has been pure joy. Like I said, they're just coachable. They listen to you. They get it. And every team's a little bit different. But this group is special.

Again, it's led by those seniors. These older guys that sit in the front rows of this room are the main guys. And I think your team goes as your seniors and your leadership guys go in this room. And what happens in those locker rooms, the cohesion that that senior group has brought to this football team has been one of the best I've been around. And I've been around some pretty good ones, too.

This senior class, that will be an emotional morning, evening Friday night, Saturday morning. And couldn't be more grateful for the work, effort that those guys have put into this game.

Q. It was one of the best games (inaudible) generated pressure on the quarterback. Certainly impacted some of (inaudible) those interceptions. What has worked for you guys defensively and how do you rekindle that going into Miami that's (inaudible)?

PAT NARDUZZI: You're talking pressure last week?

Q. Yes.

PAT NARDUZZI: Did we have pressure on the quarterback last week? Wasn't as good as I'd like it to be.

The second half we weren't as good as I'd like to be. We've got to get more pressure than what we saw Saturday. Obviously forced an interception.

Kyle Louis, great play there. We've got to be more -- we've got to be better than what we were last week because this team can throw the ball as well as run the football. And obviously Georgia Tech could, too.

But we saw more drop-back game, I wish we would have put more pressure on the quarterback than what we did. We've got to clean up a lot of details and have a great game plan.

Q. Kyle had that pressure, like you mentioned on the interception. He also had a sack. It was actually his

first sack since the Duquesne game.

PAT NARDUZZI: It was?

Q. It was. He set a high bar last year. How do you think he's been this season? The numbers aren't quite what they were a year ago.

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, it's probably my biggest worry going into the season, he had so much success and those splash plays and you want to call them. Then all of a sudden, sometimes they come, sometimes they don't. And you have to have opportunities.

He hasn't missed too many opportunities when he's had opportunities to get there, whether the ball's thrown, they throw it quick, we blitz them, it's three step.

He's a linebacker. Let's not forget, he's not rushing to the (inaudible) -- he's not a defensive, he's not rushing the quarterback every snap.

Sometimes you press and I think there's times where he's pressed and trying to make big plays when he just needs to do his job. That's what I've stressed. It doesn't matter. You know, those NFL scouts are going to watch your tape and they're going to find out if you did things right or you're doing it wrong and you're trying to do your own thing.

So Kyle's been great all year. I don't care what his stats look like. I care about what his pluses and minuses on that grade sheet at the end of the day are.

Q. When you're in situation like the last few possessions of that game on Saturday, obviously tempo's a big part of your offense, but what's your approach and Kade's approach and the conversation you've had with him about balancing doing what you do and also trying to run as much of the clock as you can?

PAT NARDUZZI: I mean, we have not been as fast people might think we are. There's an illusion we're fast. We're trying to get ourselves into good plays, which we did -- you know I don't know what our really fast tempo has been this year percentage-wise compared to last year. I didn't go back and look at it.

But we're trying to be in a good place. And I don't care if we go fast, if we go slow, I want production. I like those 28 points. I don't care how you do it. I never want to handcuff and I never have -- I know us guys sometimes think I handcuff because I'm a defensive guy, I've had that question from somebody else here earlier today -- like, I'm not slowing on offense down because I think once you get

out of rhythm then you've got problems. And it's my fault because I told them to slow down and not do what they're supposed to do.

And we didn't go to that second half saying let's slow down and let's milk that clock, until we get into that four-minute situation at the end when there's two minutes left on the clock. When we're in four-minute offense, then that's when we expect to snap that ball, one second, two seconds on the clock. But other than that, prior to that, let's go make plays. You don't want to slow them down.

Q. When you promoted Mason, you mentioned Kenny sort of you had a feeling that was sort of similar to when Kenny started to play when he was a freshman. Kenny ended that year with a pretty memorable game, against a really good Miami team that had big aspirations. A, how have you seen -- how have you seen Mason meet the moment? Then will you do anything this week to sort of, hey, guys, look, eight years ago this team came in here and we had a freshman quarterback and we kind of took care of business?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, that's like playing games. Like, it doesn't matter what happened back -- what year was that? 2017, they were in elementary school. They don't really care about the history, unless we bring an honorary captain in and they get to watch them play. And I don't think Kenny's available this weekend to bring him in and tell him what happened that day. That's a different offense than what we played with that day that year with Kenny and that was a different Miami team, it was a different Pitt team. It's different than in '22 when we played them down there. I think it was the last time we played them down there in Miami.

Neither one of those games will play any part in this game this weekend. It's totally different. I mean, Mario has done a heck of a job down there retooling what they are. He's built that thing from -- he's an O lineman at heart, and he's built that thing with the offensive and defensive lines. He knows how important that front is. They're strong there and it's, like, it doesn't matter what happened in '17 or '22. It will be what happens in '25, and we gotta go out and play.

Q. Do you have a timeline on Trey Butkowski's return?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, wish I did.

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