

# Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Pitt vs Michigan State

Thursday, December 30, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

**Pitt Panthers**

**Coach Pat Narduzzi**

Press Conference



Michigan State 31, Pittsburgh 21

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by head coach Pat Narduzzi.

PAT NARDUZZI: Obviously not the way we wanted to finish up the season. It's never easy. Kids played their tails off. Didn't give up at all. I think when most people thought with a third string quarterback we weren't going to be able to take it down the field, we did. It comes down to the details.

You throw a pick in the red zone when you got a chance to at least tie it up, go overtime, you just got to protect the ball, make better decisions.

It hurt obviously when Nick Patti went down. Had a nice touchdown scramble for a touchdown. Not the way you wanted your seniors to go out.

I'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Can you talk about what all went into the preparation for Davis. You talk about how Nick was making a lot of things seamless. I imagine there had to be a lot of preparation into Nick, not as much time into Davis. How do you think he responded to that challenge?**

PAT NARDUZZI: He did about as good as he could. Obviously he got the two reps. He got I would say 80% of the two reps. You got to prepare for the next guy two. Joey Yellen got reps, too.

It's hard. It's hard when you're preparing, have a backup that didn't have a start in someone said 840 days since he started a game, played a bunch of reps.

Obviously it hurt when he went down. But our kids hung in

there. We got a chance to win the ballgame with a minute to go in the game, at least tie the ballgame. We were on the field too long offensively, lost 10 minutes. A 16-play drive. 16-play and a 13-play drive to get those last two touchdowns, which hurt. You hope your defense is going to stop them.

We just weren't fresh enough. Didn't make enough plays on defense to get off the field. It's what it is.

**Q. What can you say about Davis Beville, what he was able to do. Looking at a third string quarterback leading you to get into field goal range, completed all his passes until the interception. What he did in this game to showcase what he can be.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we didn't do a great job protecting in the third quarter I don't think. We'll go back and look what happened there. Wasn't happy obviously with the protection, what our O-line did. Until you watch the tape, you really don't know.

But Davis did a great job. As good as you expect a third team quarterback to do. Wasn't good enough to win the football game.

All our guys hung in there and played their tails off for him. We just didn't make enough plays in all phases. Doesn't ever lie with one guy or one quarterback. You need guys around you playing better. We didn't get that done today.

**Q. How big of a loss was it losing Izzy as well in the running game when you have a backup in Nick, a third stringer in Davis, to be able to lean on the running game?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we got definitely banged up. Izzy was obviously a big part of the game plan. He's big, fast, physical. He's a starter. That didn't help us either.

But again, Vincent has had a ton of reps. So has Rodney. That's why you work 'em all year round. You never know when you're going to be down to one guy or two guys.

That wasn't a factor. But obviously you'd like to see Izzy



be able to finish the game.

**Q. What did you see in the fourth quarter from Payton Thorne and Jayden Reed in particular?**

PAT NARDUZZI: They made plays. They converted I think 50% of third down, which usually is not us. We'll go back and look at the coverage. Maybe an exhausted secondary, I don't know. We'll look at it.

But we didn't make enough plays back there. Not having Damarri Mathis is a factor. Starting corner, best corner. That was a factor. Some other young guys were out there. We'll look at it.

You look at whatever we held them to, 24 points. It was a solid day, but not good enough to win against a good team.

**Q. At the end of a game like that, after a season like this, historic for the program, what is the message to your team?**

PAT NARDUZZI: It's never easy. I mean, at the end it won't be easy for two teams tomorrow that are playing in a Playoff game. Someone is going to lose. You have a great season like that, get to the Playoffs. It's never easy.

We got a lot coming back. We'll start the work tomorrow towards an ACC championship for next year. That's the goal. That's the standard that we have.

It's not easy. But that's the ballgame. We haven't lost for a while. Our kids have a lot of confidence. So it hurts. They're hurting there. They're frustrated. A lot of tears in that locker room. They care and they fought.

**Q. Just wanted to talk about the defense. They put on an inspired performance early on. You saw late in there it looked like they were able to connect on some, but it seemed like a lot of theirs were tight throws into tight coverages. Did you feel like it was more they were making great plays, or were there communication breakdowns that you thought were happening?**

PAT NARDUZZI: There was one communication when Heyward caught a ball in the flats where we were playing man free. That's the only one miscommunication. Safety gave him the wrong call. That was the one miscommunication.

But again, you give them credit. Heyward had a heck of a catch in the end zone. It was a heck of a throw and catch on the end. You got a guy in coverage, you got to make a play. That's what it comes down to, you got to make a play.

M.J. is hurt in there, as well. But he'll only get better for 2022.

**Q. You had two shots at the ACC championship in the last few seasons, got your first for Pittsburgh this year. What can you say about where this team is, where the state of the program is?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, like I said to the team afterwards, I love every one of those guys in there. They fought their tails off. I'd go to war with them any day. There's never been any quit. It takes years to get what we got. We got a championship now. Now we got to try for a repeat.

We got a good football team. We got a lot of guys coming back. We'll just work on the next.

**Q. Could you share with us the nature of Nick's injury?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I guess the season's over. Broke a collarbone, which is our third one this year. Just freak accident, I guess. I mean, that's what happens when you hit the ground a little bit odd. He'll get that fixed tomorrow.

He wanted to go back and play. Our doctors weren't going to let that happen.

**Q. He's going to have surgery, then?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes, Jerry. I'll give that to you at the end, Mr. Injury.

**Q. You talked about some of the younger players. Dayon Hayes had three tackles for loss in this game. What did you think of what you saw out of him?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Dayon did a nice job. Deslin didn't play, obviously. You guys saw that. He got injured during the week in bowl practice down here. He's okay. Just was risky to put him out there.

Just being safe. I know he was disappointed. But when you look -- that's why Dayon got more plays. Dayon is going to be an outstanding player for us. He's only going to keep getting better. He's smart, athletic. There's a lot of good football for Dayon Hayes in the future.

**Q. When you have an injury like the one Nick suffered early in the game, how does that change the environment on the sideline? Does it change the mood that early in the game, or still plugging away?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think our kids plugged away. I

don't think they bat an eye. We just didn't get things going.

That's not me, so...

Again, it's tough. It's not easy. But our kids battled. You look at play with a third string quarterback, we took them to the end. You would have loved to see what would have happened if Nick played the whole game, but it's not easy.

**Q. What can you say about Jordan Addison, what you saw from him going into the season and then all the way through this season? Has he somehow exceeded your expectations?**

PAT NARDUZZI: I would say so. Jordan Addison is an outstanding player. I don't know what hasn't been said about him. Winning a Biletnikoff. Wish he'd had more than seven catches. Probably should have got him the ball more, just couldn't get it to him enough. In the second half, the play was just to have Davis look to find No. 3 and throw it to him, let him go make a play.

We started with a couple drops. Weren't easy catches. Jordan had a nice game. Nice reverse. Didn't get our return game going with him. But Jordan Addison is a spectacular football player, is going to have a big '22 season as well.

**Q. With the offensive line, that group is coming back next year, what do you say to a group like that that had a great year, end on a downer?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know what, probably every one of those guys, they're disappointed. I don't think they played as good as they needed to. We'll look at the tape and find out what happened, where it was. There was just a lot of four-man pressure. There wasn't a lot of blitzing going on, I don't think. A lot of those were four-man pressures and we didn't execute well enough.

They know that. When you're playing with a second and a third string quarterback, that O-line has got to step up and play better than they did.

**Q. Towards the end of the game you had an opportunity to put the game away on the second to last possession on offense. On third down you ran the pitch play. How involved were you in that play call? Would you change your mind if you could?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We can all second-guess. It was a check based on what they were giving us. We could have checked and ran a power play, what we call flip it out there.

They played it well. We didn't execute it good enough. What are you going to do? I'm not involved in play calls. I don't go second-guess. I don't second-guess a play-caller.

**Q. There's a report out that Texas is set to hire Brennan Marion. I don't know if as a coach, have you been informed of any decision on his part?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No, I haven't. No, I haven't. I was focused on this football team, the guys that want to be with us. When you have good coach, people are going to come after them. Guys have decisions to make. Whatever he wants to do, I'm good. We'll be fine.

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