

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Pitt Panthers

Coach Pat Narduzzi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with questions for Coach Narduzzi.

Q. You're one of just a few coaches who have been at Pitt for 10 years. Have you taken any time to reflect on your legacy, what you've been able to do?

PAT NARDUZZI: No, you don't take much time as a coach to look and see what you did in the past. You're kind of looking forward. We're looking forward to 2024. Not one of those years we had a year ago that you're saying, What kind of legacy do I have? You build your legacy year by year.

We'll take each year one at a time. 2024 we're looking forward to kind of bouncing back and getting where we need to be.

Q. What does 'accomplish greatness' mean to you?

PAT NARDUZZI: Accomplish greatness? Again, I got a lot of pride. Let's start with the Commissioner Phillips, I think he does an outstanding job. You talk about a leader of this conference. To me it starts when you talk about greatness with your commissioner, trickles on down to your chancellors. Unbelievable chancellor in Joan Gabel. Our A.D. Heather Lyke, down to every coach in the conference. Starts at the top.

I've always said everybody's got to be going in the right direction. Jim Phillips takes us in the right direction. It's trying to be the best you can be in everything you do. That's kind of what we do at Pitt.

Q. Could you describe what Kade Bell has brought to the table this off-season, how the offense has changed?

PAT NARDUZZI: I think it's a great question for the offense players here, Gavin and Nate.

I couldn't tell you. I don't know if there's been a season, I can't tell you how excited I am to watch them go. I watched them in the spring for 15 days, listened to our guys talk about some individual workouts, team sessions they've had against the defense, how much more knowledge they have.

You think about putting a new offense in, going through 15 days of spring ball, installing it in January and February in the indoor facility, meetings.

We've added a few more layers to that as the summer went on. Our players led that for the most part. OTAs out on the field for 30 minutes.

I couldn't be more excited. I'm a defensive guy. I'm going to turn our offense loose. People wonder, a defensive guy, put handcuffs. That's the craziest thing I've ever heard. In nine seasons, I've never put handcuffs on an offensive coordinator, you have to do this or that. Let them go be them. That's how I was coached. That's how Mark Dantonio treated me when I was a defensive coordinator. He didn't micromanage. I don't micromanage what they call, when they call it. That's on them.

I couldn't be more excited for Kade Bell and the entire offensive staff to get that thing rolling come September.

Q. Athletic directors talk about having administrators in their bottom drawer ready to call when the moment is right. How long have you known Kade?

PAT NARDUZZI: That's a great question.

He wasn't on my radar very long at all. This is one of those out-of-the-box ones. I think sometimes you go into hires, this is what I need. I needed a guy who was going to score points, have our offense have some enthusiasm. I needed a guy with energy, a guy who could be really creative in what he was doing offensively. I wanted that for our players.

I talked all the time during the season when things are going good, not going good, we win and lose as a team. When things aren't going good, it's my job to fix them.



Kade Bell was a guy kind of off the radar. Just doing a lot of homework. Looked at a bunch of different guys. Narrowed down to that guy. I've done that with most of my hires. Those are the best hires you're making. I'm not hiring friends. I'm hiring guys that help us win championships. Another one of these things.

In the last 13 years, there's only been three teams that could put a championship ring on their finger; Clemson, Florida State and Pitt. We'll make sure nobody forgets that.

Q. Over the last two years, you are playing Pittsburgh again, how important is it to have that series back and to revive football in Pittsburgh?

PAT NARDUZZI: Start off at the beginning again.

Q. I was talking about Pittsburgh -- I'm sorry West Virginia.

PAT NARDUZZI: You confused me. You're good.

Great to have that rivalry back. We embrace rivalries. We embrace rivalries. We'd love to play Penn State if they would play us. If they won't play us, we'd love to play West Virginia as many times as we could play them. They're coming back to Pittsburgh.

Our kids couldn't be more excited. They have an idea after two years what a real rivalry game is. I think you need to lose a rivalry game to understand what it means to you. These guys might be able to talk about that a little bit.

I think you have to lose one to know, I don't ever want to lose a rivalry game again. That's kind of what we go into this game with in '24.

Q. You get the West Virginia game back, but you also host California, then have to go to Dallas. Is that what college sports is right now, you get your little bit of rivalry, but now have to go across the country?

PAT NARDUZZI: Cal, Stanford and SMU are obviously in the ACC. To me, I don't look like it's a foreign game. We've embraced that. We're excited to have them in the conference. Our kids are excited to travel to Dallas and eventually to Cal to go play. You can look at it as a non-conference game. Nothing unusual in college football. Whether a non-conference game or a new conference as far as how things are moving around in the conference exchanges.

I think it's something that we embrace.

Q. Over the past five seasons, Pitt has collected a combined 230 quarterback sacks. That's the highest total in the nation. A lot of variables that go into that. What is the coaching, the scheme?

PAT NARDUZZI: It's amazing after three years we lead the country in sacks because we were just awful last year, weren't we, Donovan? We didn't get any sacks.

I think there's a couple things going into it. When you have an explosive offense, scoring points on offense, that helps. An opposing offense has to come against you, throw the ball a little bit more. Our guys found out the hard way when you don't stop the run, they can run or pass it, you'll struggle.

If you looked at it last year, last year we didn't have any sacks, the two previous years, top in the country in sacks.

That comes with playing complementary offense and defense together. Obviously special teams. We're looking to increase that sack total. I don't care who is returning on offense or defense, it doesn't matter. We do a great job schematically. Randy Bates, our defensive coordinator. We lost one defense coach to the Indianapolis Colts and Tim Daoust replaces him. We're excited about a little bit of newness on defense, getting after quarterbacks.

Q. You've had nine defensive backs drafted since 2018 and one at least every year for the last six years. Why have these guys been so special and do you see this trend continuing?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes, I see the trend continuing. We have another one sitting up here in front of you today to have his opportunity to have his name called in next year's draft.

Again, like I was asked about the sacks, some of the successes we've had on defense, it comes down to how we play, how aggressive we play. We're going to press our corners, our safeties are going to be aggressive in the run and pass game. We're in your face. We're not giving you free access. I think that gives our kids an opportunity to learn what they need to do when they go to the next level.

When you go to the NFL, better be able to play press corners, man coverage. We're not afraid to go up there and do that.

A lot of teams, people started to press a little bit more the last few years it seems. But we're not afraid. When our guys get to the NFL, they're getting drafted and having success. Sixth round, seventh round. Damarri Mathis,



who we were just communicating with yesterday, started with the Denver Broncos. He's a sixth rounder. He gets into the situation in an NFL pro camp, mini camp, he doesn't get nervous when he lines up against a receiver in the NFL and he has to press 'em. Same thing for our safeties. They're not afraid to play man coverage with four-man rush. They embrace that as well.

They are trained to play coverage. They're really smart. M.J. Devonshire, who's out with the Raiders, from what I've heard, they love him out there right now because he's so smart. Whether you're fast, strong, intelligence is important in the game of football. He's going to do a great job there because he can run it all, he knows it all. He's been trained for a few years.

Q. You have four players on the roster from California, but Stanford and Cal joining the ACC, does that open up the left coast a little bit more for you?

PAT NARDUZZI: It does. It's a legitimate question there. We actually jumped into Texas. A little bit closer. With the state of California, we have a couple players from there. If there's a Pitt connection, we're going to attack a guy out in California. That's a long way from home. I think it's hard.

We have jumped down into Texas with SMU coming into the conference. A new place, again, Austin, Texas, native in Nate Yarnell. He was a COVID recruit. I didn't get to his home visit.

We have really sunk our teeth into the state of Texas right now because of SMU. But we haven't really done that into California.

My philosophy recruiting-wise is to keep your areas small. We have a kid from Indiana. We haven't had a kid from Indiana since I've been here. There better be a connection. If I spread our 10 assistant coaches too thin, they're going to go into a state and hit a few schools and leave to go to the next state. I want to make sure I dot the Is and cross the Ts in every state.

In the last three years, we've had more guys drafted than anybody in the ACC. We're getting the right guys and we're not missing. You can spread your net really wide, make a lot of mistakes, and be driving by really good players to get this other player that you thought was good that's not very good.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

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