

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

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Pitt Panthers

Coach Pat Narduzzi

Lyndon Cooper

Kyle Louis

Desmond Reid

Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Good afternoon, everybody. I can't see anybody out there, those lights are bright. Again, good afternoon. We are excited at the University of Pittsburgh to be here today. It's, again, the start of the 2025 season. We bring in a healthy, fresh, energized football team that has a ton of optimism going into this '25 season. We returned a lot of great players on our football team, I think, number one.

Number two, I think we bring back an entire coaching staff of ten guys. That doesn't happen all the time. So to have our entire coaching staff back at Pitt, we're excited.

It's a heck of a conference. Commissioner's done a great job. I'm blessed to be going into my 11th season at Pitt under the leadership of our chancellor and our Athletic Director, Allen Greene. They've been outstanding. We look forward to an incredible season and being back here in Charlotte come December.

Q. You spoke about feeling good about being in the ACC. Commissioner speaking about the future, about the membership, about everybody being together in this unique world we live in with the transfer portal, free agency, essentially, the NIL, the House settlement. How are you addressing all of this as a head coach? Because a coach has got to coach, but now you have all these other elements of essentially recruiting the players that you have while recruiting new players at the same time.

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, it's a 24/7 job here nowadays. It's a little different than when I arrived in Pittsburgh in 2015. I think there's so many other options on the board as far as what you're doing, how you're doing it. That's why you



surround yourself with incredible staff. That's why I'm so fortunate to have Joan Gabel there to help guide from above and Allen Greene and everybody in our athletic department helping you, like, hey, we've got suggestions. You've got tools.

A head football coach without an offensive coordinator or defensive coordinator or special teams coordinator isn't very good. You can't do it by yourself. We have tools. All the things, the different circumstances that happen in college football, I think, number one, we're working towards a better path in college football. I think we're on the mend a little bit. I think the House settlement, the revenue sharing is a better model. We get everything else under control, I feel good.

Again, my job is to coach. Ultimately in the end, I want to coach these guys. This is where I have fun, and that remains my job. I tell the guys all the time, I feel like I'm the Mike Tomlin on the other side of the building. I want to be a football coach. I don't want to be in administrative. If I wanted to be administrative, I'd go be an AD. I want to be a football coach. I've got other people to do some of the things I don't want to do. I know what I want to do. I want to coach football, have relationships with my players, and I want to have fun. And that's where the fun begins.

Q. Heading into the 2025 season, and really over the course of fall camp, what's the mentality you're hoping to instill in your overall roster, and what's the overall goal that you guys are shooting for?

PAT NARDUZZI: I'll start with the last part of that question. The overall goal is to win a championship. Our guys break down on ACC champs every day. I said yesterday, hey, when we break down on that, it's July, we're a week away from camp opening up, like, you'd better mean it. Just don't say it to say it, it's say it to mean it.

In the last ten years, there's only been three teams to win an ACC Championship, and we're one of them. That's the goal every single year. I thought we could do it last year. I thought we could do it the year before, and I think we can do it now. We have a talented football team. Most of our weapons are back. We did not lose anybody that we

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wanted to keep in the transfer portal. We've enhanced our roster.

We stay healthy, I think we have an opportunity to win a championship, period. That's the goal. When we win a championship, I tell the players all the time, we're going to the playoffs. That's your only guaranteed way of getting in the playoffs. I don't care, 12, 15, 18; it doesn't matter. You win an ACC Championship, we're in the playoffs, and that's where the fun begins.

Q. You've gone on record as to wanting to play West Virginia and Penn State every single year. What is the significance of playing those two games to you? And do you believe there's an actual possibility in the near future?

PAT NARDUZZI: Yes. We'll stick with West Virginia today because they're on our schedule and we get to play them Game 3 on 9/13. I think with the way the college landscape is going, the conferences have kind of exploded, and we've got teams from the West Coast that are in the Atlantic Coast Conference. I think those regional rivalry games are critical.

Our players look forward to playing West Virginia every year. That's a rivalry game that will end after this year. I think maybe three years it picks back up. So we do have a four-game stretch. If you guys have any power to see if we can get them in the next three years, we're willing to make some movements in our schedule and try to get that done. I would love to play them every year.

To have at least one rivalry game, which is West Virginia right now, we'd love to have them on. Again, that's what the game is all about. Those regional rivalries, it brings fans in. The fans love it. Our players love it. It's intense. There's no love lost. That's what it's all about. That's college football.

Q. With the extended playoff, recruiting, the transfer portal, and all that, what would you like to see changed on the calendar to make it a little more...

PAT NARDUZZI: I was going to see if we could get 13 months a year. That would help. That would keep us from having to make changes anywhere else. 13 months, wouldn't that be great? We could really spread things out.

June might be the worst month of the year. It used to be a pretty good month, then you add in camps all over the place, camps on your campus. You throw in the possibility of having three or four official visit weekends. We also like to coach, too, and we like to have workouts with our players and be around them and go watch them in the

weight room. That doesn't happen anymore like it used to. There was times we used to go stand down in the weight room and watch our guys for an hour. Our head DB coach would go down there and watch them and talk to them and just have fun with them.

It doesn't happen like it used to be. Thank God, we have an incredible strength staff to take care of that and be with our players every day.

I don't know if I answered your question, but if I didn't, you can give me a second question.

Q. Just a question about your sophomore quarterback, led you guys to a 7-0 start. Your defense is also really good. Talk about the growth you've seen in him. Obviously fall camp is right around the corner, but what have you seen from Holstein, just in his growth?

PAT NARDUZZI: The defense is not okay yet. We still have a long way to go. Got that, Kyle? We can make improvements in every phase of our game. There's three phases -- offense, defense, and special teams -- that are important. We've got to take care of the inches better and finish a lot of different things.

Going back to the first part of the question, Eli Holstein had a great off-season. He had an incredible summer with our football team. He went through all of spring ball, got 15 days in. I can't tell you he was completely healthy. He was still banged up from an injury during the season. Took him a little longer than we hoped. But he is back, 224 pounds, ripped up.

We're excited about round two with him. We didn't expect -- last year, I sat at this podium talking about a different guy and did not expect him to take the reins like he did a year ago. He is the ultimate competitor.

I think, when game day comes around, that's his deal. Then when it comes down to fourth quarter when the game's on the line, that's a guy you want taking every snap and touching that ball when it counts. We've got a ton of respect for him. There's pressures on him.

Again, I think year two with him under center or maybe behind center, I should say -- we don't go under center very often. But with him back there, it's going to be even better. We're excited about the future with him, and we're excited about the other guys in that room, as well. We've got a couple of really good football players behind him. Mason Heintschel and Cole Gonzalez are two guys that are going to be competing, as well, in that room.



Q. Coach, you have consistently put out linebacking corps after linebacking corps of dominant performers. Whether you've had a good or a bad season at Pitt, that has been a trademark of Pitt at this point. What is it that you coach that creates these outstanding linebacking corps that you continue to have?

PAT NARDUZZI: We have two All-Americans up here today, and one of them is an All-American linebacker, Kyle Louis. On the other side of the field with him is Rasheem Biles; Heem, nickname. And then in the middle, Braylan Lovelace. So those three might be the three best linebackers -- I'll say that, the three best linebackers in the country on the field at the same time. They'll be on the field every down.

They don't come off the field on third down. We don't take one of our linebackers out on third down and put a DB in there and go nickel. We take out a D-lineman. We're not taking any of those linebackers off the field. Matter of fact, we may play with five or six linebackers this year. That linebacker corps, Coach Manalac's done a great job of not only recruiting but developing those guys.

When you look at our linebacking crew, you look at the development, but I also think it's partly schemed. Some of the things we do, like when Kyle Louis goes to the field, we're going to blitz them. A lot of times with a field linebacker, we're going to find different ways to blitz them. I don't care if there's three open out there, we're going to blitz them this year. So we're going to find different ways to bring him into pressures.

It's the aggressiveness of our defense, the opportunity to let those guys' instincts take over in a game. We're not a gap-oriented team, per se. A lot of defenses are, hey, I've got the A gap. I've got to stay in the A gap. We're in an attack front up front, and our linebackers are going to find the hole.

Kyle Louis, you've seen him take a couple interceptions and run with the ball. He's as good as any tailback in the country, as well. He has a great ability to key the football, find the hole, and hit the guy with the ball. That ability to loosen up and just let those guys have free reins to go find the ball and find a hole, not necessarily -- I don't care if our linebackers know what gaps are. Some may not know what an A gap, B gap, C gap, or D gap is, but we want Kyle Louis to go to the ball. The ball is the main thing.

We're aggressive with what we do, whether it's in base defense or with our pressures. We've not only had -- I'll throw this out there. We've not only had just linebackers get drafted, whether it's SirVocea Dennis, but we've had guys drafted. In my ten years, we've had 31 guys drafted.

In the last five years, we've had 20 guys drafted. My first five, just 11.

Then as we continue to recruit and develop our players, we've had 20 in the last two years, and 17 of those guys have been high school players, not transfers. Only three transfers have come in and gone off to the NFL. Again, that transfer number will probably go up because the portal has become increasingly more effective for us and for everybody in the country.

So I think we've developed NFL talent more than anybody in the country. To me, that's a tribute to our players, their buy-in to what we do, our scheme, and again, our assistant coaches developing our players fundamentally and giving them an opportunity to make plays.

Q. You talked about the ACC conference as a whole. What was kind of your reaction to Bill Belichick taking the head coaching job at North Carolina, and what does it mean for the ACC as a conference?

PAT NARDUZZI: Is this a Pitt question, or is this a North Carolina question? Bill Belichick, one of the greatest coaches to ever coach the game. Won six Super Bowls with the New England Patriots. I've enjoyed conversations with him, whether it be at Amelia Island or in Zoom calls with ACC coaches. He's a tremendous football coach, really smart.

Again, he adds a lot of flavor and excitement to the ACC. When you look at Bill Belichick coming to the Atlantic Coast Conference, it just tells you how attractive our conference is.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. You and Lyndon can switch spots.

PAT NARDUZZI: Lyndon Cooper, he'll be another drafted center. Here we go.

Q. I'm just curious, you guys got some transfer offensive linemen this off-season. What's your responsibility as a center in the middle there to help get those guys up to speed?

LYNDON COOPER: Really just bring in the culture of our O-line room. I feel like this year, our O-line room has changed. We brought back some guys from the O-line last year, like you said, brought in three other guys that will really be key contributors to our O-line this year. So really just teaching them the culture, and for me, just leading them and being that voice for the O-line and making sure they're confident in their play.

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Q. As a center in this offensive scheme, what strides have you been able to take over the spring? And now heading into fall camp, what are you hoping to build upon as you head towards the 2025 season?

LYNDON COOPER: Really for this off-season, I focus on just my athleticism and really just my power and run blocking skills. That's a couple of things I really keyed in on this off-season, and making sure that I'm in the best shape I can be in. I have great mobility to last a 14, 15-game season. That's, like, the three main things I worked on this off-season.

Q. You spoke about the transfers coming in. Just what the balance and flow is on this offensive line heading into the fall of the guys returning like yourself and those new faces. What that flow's been like.

LYNDON COOPER: The flow's been good. We really picked up some good guys out of the portal, with Keith Gouveia playing left guard, Jeff Perci, and Kendall Stanley. Those guys came in ready to work, humble, and ready to listen. The flow of the O-line room, like I said, is way better than it was last year. We all love each other. That's another reason why we all came back, decided to come back to Pitt.

I just feel like we're going to be very dominant this season and make sure we keep our quarterbacks protected.

Q. You come from Carrollton High School, a high school that has a very proud tradition of winning championships and things along those lines. You're now at the last coastal school to win a conference championship, in terms of ACC Championship. How does that winning culture permeate and spread, and in what ways has it manifested this off-season that you're looking forward to carrying into fall camp and during the season?

LYNDON COOPER: Many ways. Just being able to be around those championship teams and learning from guys like Javon and Coach Duzzi, who's been in those situations. It just shows us we're more than capable to do that. All we have to do is not beat ourselves, and like Coach Duzzi says, don't have the release syndrome. When we're up, we're up. When we're down, we've got to find a way to get back up. Just having a championship mindset and confidence while we play is a key thing we need this season.

Q. How does your upbringing, how does your background, how does it shape you and your competitive mindset?

LYNDON COOPER: For my upbringing, I was kind of under-recruited coming out of high school. Had a situation -- I came from NC State for three years and was kind of put into a pickle, and when I decided to get in the portal, I wanted to put my career in my own hands. I bet on myself, and thankfully Coach Duzzi allowed me in his building and gave me the keys and the tools and the knowledge I needed to be the best me I can be.

I know I can be a dominant center in this league and wherever I go next. I just want to keep growing and keep -- that's one thing about myself, I like to learn from other people. When I train, I like to go to different trainers just to pick other people's brain to see what I need to fix in my game, see how I can help other guys in the room elevate my IQ of the game.

My upbringing is just never being complacent and always be ready to work.

THE MODERATOR: We'll bring up Kyle now.

Q. You spoke about this team being an actual brotherhood. We hear family all the time, all throughout the country from a lot of different schools. Why do you believe this is not a fabricated thing, not just for the media or for the outside, but this is an actual brotherhood, an actual family in a world that desperately needs it in college football?

KYLE LOUIS: That was the main focus of the off-season. Like, we've got to work from the ground, work the foundation. First thing was culture. I honestly forgot who he was, Coach Duz, but he brought somebody in. Right before the OTA practice, we just talked about what's the culture of the team for 30 to an hour straight.

That's, like, our main thing. Main thing, to rebuild, the first steps, and that's just going to carry on for fall camp to the times where it gets rough during the season.

Q. You and the defense were a huge part of why Pitt had so much success as a team last year. What strides are you and the unit as a whole taking to ensure that you not only match that success this season but exceed it?

KYLE LOUIS: Just put the same work ethic that I put in last year. For me, they gave me a cut-up of all the plays I did good and all the plays I did bad. Just going over the plays I did bad, see why I did bad, what was I doing, not do it again.

Coach Bates always tell us always bring a young guy with you. So bringing the young guys with me, helping them not



only understand the playbook, but like with somebody like me, how do I read the plays? How do I, like, get the instincts to try to jump something, or what am I thinking of? Just keep bringing more people around and just keep getting better together.

Q. From a player's perspective, can you give us an insight of how intense the backyard brawl rivalry is?

KYLE LOUIS: It's fun. Like, it ain't no pressure, but it's definitely fun. It's something, a blessing to be a part of. It's a great rivalry. There's a lot of talking that goes on on the field. It is what it is. It definitely be talking off the field. It's definitely a grudge and definitely a date that's circled on our calendar. September 13th, we're definitely going to walk into Morgantown and take over.

Q. I saw you over there grinning from ear to ear when Coach Narduzzi was talking about how you're as good as any running back with the ball in your hands and all those things. What does it mean to you to have a head coach that reassures you and believes in you in that type of way that gives you the freedom to say, hey, we're not asking you to be a robot. We're not asking you to hit this gap every single time. We trust your instincts and trust you to be a football player and make plays.

KYLE LOUIS: It means everything to me because that's the reason I'm in the position I'm in now. For him to have the trust in me to go make the play or even just call the play so I can make the play is going to be a reason why I make another great season again and lead the team to a championship.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle, you and Desmond can switch places. We'll finish out our time with Pitt with our running back.

Q. You're someone at the running back position that does a little bit of everything, whether it's in the run game, in the pass game. How do you approach being such a multi-faceted player at the position? And now heading into 2025, what do you want to showcase to even build upon that even further?

DESMOND REID: You know me. I'm a smaller guy, so I got to do a little bit of everything. Can't be like a regular running back. I've got to do everything.

This year, shoot, last year I didn't really showcase everything I could do for real. I didn't really play every game. This year, that's my main focus, trying to play every game, be there for the team, showcase what I can do to help the team win.

Q. Being a running back at Pitt, a few guys, Curtis Martin, LeSean McCoy, James Conner, Tony Dorsett, Craig Heyward, the list goes on and on. What does it mean to you to be in a backfield that has such a rich tradition, rich history. As Pat Narduzzi talked about, guys are going to the NFL when they go to Pitt.

DESMOND REID: That means a lot. LeSean McCoy was my favorite running back when I was growing up. That means a lot just to be at the same school he played at and put on a show, that RB culture. I'm just focused on helping the team this year, doing whatever I could.

Q. You were one of under ten backs last year that was over 1,500 offensive yards from scrimmage, and yet you say there was a lot of things that you didn't show you could do last year. What is the ceiling, and what are the things we'll potentially see you do this year that may not be utilized as much last year?

DESMOND REID: There's no ceiling. Just do whatever I can. Every game, be there for the team. Every game, like I said, I was dealing with injuries last year, just trying to stay healthy and be there for the team.

This year I got a statement to prove. I've got to do what I need to do to get where I want to go to lead.

Q. You mentioned your height and that you've got to work a little bit harder. Was there a moment in your childhood in which that realization came to you, that this is who I am and this is what I've got to do?

DESMOND REID: Growing up, my dad always -- I was always a smaller guy, so my dad always told me, don't worry about what people say about you, just do what you can do, handle what you can handle. God blessed me with the skills he gave me, and I just never worry about what people say, just go out there and play.

Q. Do you have to win a championship in order to call it a successful season?

DESMOND REID: Yes. That's the goal for every team. You're not playing to not win the championship. So the goal is the championship.

Q. Coming from the FCS, I don't think too many people really expected you to blow up the way you did in your first season with Pitt. Can you talk about the difference in talent level coming from those divisions football?

DESMOND REID: To me, it didn't really feel like no



difference. If you're a game player, you're a game player, no matter where it's at. There's a lot of great players in the FCS. They don't really get a chance to showcase their talent. I'm just blessed to be able to do that.

Shout out to the FCS players.

Q. Quarterback Eli Holstein, just what he was able to do, the success that he had last season. What are we going to see this season from this offense, and what are you excited about in working with him and working with this team?

DESMOND REID: Eli, he matured a lot this off-season. He's a young guy. He matured a lot. I seen him in and out of meeting rooms with Coach K to see what he could have done better to help the team win. I'm just excited for him this year, ready to go out there and play this whole season with him. I think he's going to be real good this year.

Q. It says a lot that Coach Narduzzi brought you. You're one of the few running backs that are here today. Would you rather be more of that bell cow running back, or would you rather be a running back by committee, that way you stay fresh throughout the game?

DESMOND REID: Whatever my team needs me. I'm a team player. If my team needs me to go out there and play every play, that's what I want to do. I don't really care about it. I just want to help the team win.

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