

If the sweat running off each player's forehead during post-practice interviews wasn't enough, the tone of each voice quickly told the story about Pitt's first session of spring drills.

"Very quick," said receiver Mike Shanahan.

"Fast-paced," said quarterback Anthony Gonzalez.

"It's one thing watching it on film," said a smiling Lucas Nix, a two-year starter on the offensive line. "It's another thing to realize you're snapping the ball every 15 or 20 seconds."

From the first whistle of the day, speed was the theme for the Panthers at their South Side facility on Tuesday afternoon. Practice started with position drills, as quarterbacks coach Todd Dodge worked on the quarterback-to-running back exchange while tight ends coach Tony Dews ran each of his players through cone drills. The defense lined up in new formations on the other side of the field while Mike Norvell — from close range — rocketed passes at each receiver at a rapid pace.

With each blow of the whistle, players sprinted from one spot on the field to another.

From the sidelines, it was tough to follow. And when talking to Anthony Gonzalez, one reporter used the term, "organized chaos" to describe the practice's pace.

"There's a lot of learning; a lot of teaching," said Norvell, Pitt's co-offensive coordinator. "We're doing everything at an extremely fast pace. So it was an exciting first day."

For Shanahan, the term "very quick" may have been an understatement.

"It was probably 100 times more," Shanahan said. "We didn't really know what to expect.

"We were all on our toes. I don't think any of us could have expected this. But everyone picked things up pretty well. It's really exciting."

Norvell said a key to installing Pitt's new, no-huddle system is helping the players to learn that the pace which the coaches are aiming for won't be achieved in just one day. While the tempo seemed rapid on Tuesday, the pace will continue to multiply with each practice, starting now and running all the way through the start of the 2011 season.

"We want to get to the point where we practice at a certain tempo, then when we get to game day, it seems slow to us," Norvell said. "That's part of the process — part of what practice is all about.

"The thing we tell our guys is that when they get tired, the first thing to go is your mind. And so what we try to do is instill the disciplines they need to execute and do the little things right. It's a day-by-day thing. We're going to go in there and get a chance to evaluate the film and come back out there and have a great day on Thursday."

Shanahan agreed with Norvell's assessment on the mental strain the speed puts on each player, but said the difficulty has more to do with each player realizing where he needs to be and staying disciplined with lining up in the right spot in such a small amount of time. He also spoke about coach Todd

Graham's theory on passing the ball deep down the field at least 10 times per game and looking for game-breaking plays.

"That's what every receiver wants," he said. "In order to do that we've got to make the plays.

"I've been itching (to practice) since we found out this coaching staff was coming in. Now we kind of know what to expect. We're going to keep on building on this."

Pitt continues spring practice on Thursday at 2:30 p.m.