

# Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl: Oregon vs Indiana

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Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Curt Cignetti

## Dan Lanning

### Coaches Press Conference

DAN LANNING: Honored to be here. Certainly honored to get to participate in the Peach Bowl. Gary, appreciate everything that you do. Got an unbelievable amount of respect for Coach Cignetti and the job that he's done at Indiana. You watch this team on film, obviously we got to experience it firsthand; this is one of if not the best coached teams in college football. They play with unbelievable technique. They challenge you in every facet; in special teams, defensively, offensively.

They've got great quarterback play, which I think is a secret to being in this position that they're in. And you watch this group, they play together. They've got great answers. They do what they do extremely well.

And on defense they challenge you in every way. They give you a lot of different looks. But this is just a group that's obviously playing their best football now. You saw that in their most recent game. And, again, just honored to get the opportunity to go share a field with Coach and the job that he's done there.

MODERATOR: Thank you for that, Coach.

Coach Cignetti, we'll take an opening remark from you, please.

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah. Excited to be a part of the Peach Bowl. Great cause; it will be a great venue. Playing a great opponent, Oregon, Coach Lanning. I said so before when we played earlier in the year, one of the young superstars in the coaching profession. I think they're 26 and 2 the last two years. And really an excellent football team, offense, defense and special teams. Do a great job of coaching. Will be a big challenge.

We were fortunate to win the game out in Eugene. It's hard to beat a great team twice. Very difficult. So edged Oregon there, but oughta be a great game. Looking



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forward to the challenge.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll go ahead and jump right into questions, keep it rolling.

**Q. Dan, where is your team better? Where have you guys improved since the first time you saw Indiana this year?**

DAN LANNING: Yeah, I mean, in a lot of different facets. I won't get into every detail. You watch both of these teams. Neither one of us are the same team that you saw earlier in the season when we played each other. I think we've grown in a lot of different ways, found different strength. As your team changes, you change and adapt to your strengths in your team, and you see the same thing with Indiana.

**Q. Coach Lanning, I'm curious, when you go against Bryant Haines' defense, he was very good against you guys and then they did it for the rest of the season. When you as a head coach study them on team, you see what out of that defense that makes them as elite as they are?**

DAN LANNING: Yeah. In a lot of ways you'd call it an illusion defense. They show you one thing and they take something else away. They're really good at post-snap movement, which makes it difficult for the quarterback. Their defensive line plays with relentless effort. They're tough to block up front. And then the technique continues to show up. They've got a guy basically playing quarterback there at linebacker that's able to get them lined up and execute. They've got a strong corner there in Ponds. They fly to the ball and they attack it in the air.

Probably the best zone break defense I've seen this year in college football. They do an unbelievable job there, and they get hats. Obviously it all starts with stopping the run. They do a great job with that.

**Q. Curt, I wanted to ask you about Devan Boykin. He's kind of a guy that, from the outside looking in, has been kind of flying under the radar, but had a massive**

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**game at the Rose Bowl, and I know he's been kind of surging over the course of the season. What can you say about just the value that he brings to this team?**

CURT CIGNETTI: He's a really smart player. He knows all three safety positions. He's made a number of big plays for us. Played a lot of football at NC State, was a quarterback in high school, got great ball skills. Good special teams player as well. And he's a veteran. We've got a lot of veterans back there, which helps; played a lot of football. But he's one of the leaders in the back end.

**Q. Dan, you said Indiana gives you a lot of -- or different looks, post-snap looks. How has Dante Moore kind of progressed in that area throughout the season?**

DAN LANNING: Experience. You know, experience. You gotta remember when we played earlier in the season, Dante hadn't played a ton of games, and as you play an entire season, you get exposed to a lot of different looks, and you learn from those moments, and Dante has certainly learned from a lot of those moments what he's seen. He's been obviously a great player for us and done an unbelievable job, but he's not the same player as he was earlier this year.

What they do on defense is really difficult. You have to be willing to take what they give you at times. They do a great job of protecting against shots, but I think Dante's been a really good decisionmaker throughout the year, and that'll be something that's really important in this game.

**Q. Curt, you mentioned the challenge of beating a great team twice. I think the last time you had a rematch as a head coach was 2016 at IUP. Just wanted to get your perspective on that, the rematch, the challenges. And as somebody who appreciates the process, is that something that you feel like you'll enjoy kind of planning for a great team twice?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah. I think it's more of a psychological edge maybe; the one team that came up a little short, a little added edge, so to speak. But at the end of the day, it's determined by what goes on between the white lines.

It will be a tremendous challenge because Oregon, they're very well coached, and they got good players. They're explosive on offense. They run the ball really well. They're very balanced. The line does a good job.

And then they spread around the pass game, use all 52 yards. And, defensively, great speed, fly the ball, multiple hats.

They've got a scheme where they keep you off balance with your pre-snap reads that are huge inside, and the edge guys can really rush the passer. And their teams are good.

So second time around, you know, we're both going to watch the tape of the first game, see what we did well, see what we didn't do well. And may be some wrinkles. Both teams will have some wrinkles, obviously, and both teams have sort of morphed since that game, because it was a while back.

And you put the best plan together you can, but at the end of the day, you know, it's which team executes the best play in, play out.

**Q. Dan, kind of a full-circle moment for you here. The first game you coached was going to be in this building, and you obviously talked about how driving that game was and that result was for this program. Four years later, how much does that still drive you, drive this outcome, the direction of this program and where it's going right now?**

DAN LANNING: We're a different team now, but I remember that game very vividly. 49 to 3 wasn't fun. It was a good baptism into coaching. And we're a completely different group now. But this will be as much as of a challenge as that game was when you're playing a team like Indiana.

**Q. For both coaches, we hear a lot about quarterback play, but the offensive line is where the protection comes from to create those opportunities. Just what each of you can say about your offensive line's evolution and execution this season.**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think the one thing that helps us with pass protection is the balance that we have on the offense. We run the ball well. Oregon does, too. We both average over 200 yards a game. We both run it more than 50 percent of the time. So the pressure is not on the line to be in constant pass pro mode.

And, obviously, the quick throws, advantage throws and RPOs are built in as well.

So our line has been very consistent. We got a bunch of guys that have played together for a long time. Bob Bostad does a tremendous job with those guys. Our running backs do a nice job with pass pro as well. And we try to mix the passes up, so we got the quick stuff when we get out of the hand, and then the longer developing stuff.

But I think when you can run the ball, that really helps your pass game.

DAN LANNING: Yeah, I certainly agree with Coach. I think you look -- if a team is good at one thing, there's the ability to take it away, and you look at both of our teams, you see a team that's multiple in the sense the way they're able to run it, the way they're able to throw screen game. We both have intermediate passing game as well as shots.

I think it's about when you are going to take those plays and make those plays, making sure that you're protected, and that's something that Indiana has done a great job. People that have tried to be aggressive against them, you see them take advantage of that. They get the hats in there to protect, and they take advantage of one-on-one matchup, but our O line, Coach Terry has done a great job all season, our entire offensive staff, of game planning those opportunities.

This last game against Texas Tech, their rush was able to take advantage of us at times, so I think that will be a little bit of a chip on our guys' shoulder. There's some opportunities that we can be better there in how we hold the pocket and how we take care of the ball. But ultimately you see two teams that are really complete. And like Coach said, it really starts with the run game.

**Q. Both coaches, starting with Curt. How different is -- from what you saw in the Orange Bowl -- what Oregon's coverages were in the Orange Bowl compared to what you saw back in October? And for Dan, who and what prompted those changes, not just relative to October, but over the course of the season?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I'll be honest with you. I'm seeing some different things, some different techniques, but also, with the college football calendar the way it is, we have 13 portal guys on campus right now. So from 10:00 till 2:00 my Oregon prep got cut a little bit short. So.

, you know, I'm going to pick up on that later this evening. But philosophically, core base, they look very similar to what they did. There are some new things showing up. But the bottom line is, you know, they got guys inside. You know, good job stopping the run. They don't give up many yards rushing. They can put heat on the passer outside and with their pressure package, and they do a good job covering and swarming the ball and they do a nice job pre-snap of disguising their coverages.

DAN LANNING: Yeah. And just to build off that sentiment first, I'll tell you, Coach Cignetti, keep focusing on those portal guys.

We're going through the same thing here. Sorry, I did a breakfast with some recruits this morning. It is what it is. Right? But I think on defense you always have to adapt a little bit more to the team you're playing, and I'd say regardless of what the game is, you want to try to take away their strengths. Some of the stuff that we did previous game was built to the strengths of Texas Tech. Some of the stuff we'll do in this game have to be built around the strengths of Indiana and what we have to do there. Hopefully we are multiple and can pitch different looks, but you also have to ride the horse that got you here and do what you do well.

**Q. Coach Lanning, before the playoff run, Dante Moore said that this Indiana game he treated it a little bigger than it was, but he's learned from that. Now you guys play Indiana again, in a much bigger stage, with a trip to the national title on the line. How do you from a coaching standpoint, how do you make sure that your quarterback doesn't treat this game bigger than what it is?**

DAN LANNING: I think when games don't go your way, you're always trying to look for answers and reasons why. And it's really simple. They blocked better. They tackled better. They moved the ball and controlled the clock. They converted third downs. You know, and it was all relatively close going into the fourth quarter, and then we turned the ball over.

So you try to find all these moments that, okay, this was the difference. It's every play, right? Every play added up and every play mattered. When you're playing a team with great technique that has great scheme like Indiana, that's the edge.

But, again, I know Dante is trying to find, okay, what are the things that didn't go right and how can he be better. I have a lot of confidence in Dante and the way he preps, and knowing he maybe felt like he forced some things in this first game. He's not the same guy, like I said earlier, at this point in the season.

**Q. Dan, for you, you've obviously had a couple of opportunities to face powerhouse teams twice in a season, Washington obviously 2023, Ohio State last year.**

What do you feel like were the biggest lessons you learned in those rematches and how do you feel like those lessons have helped better prepare you for this rematch against Indiana?

DAN LANNING: Yeah. I won't get into great detail, but more than anything, stick to your process. I think Coach

Cignetti would share the same sentiment of our team with Coach Saban, one thing you learned about is process. And it's all about process. It's all about making sure -- you don't go into a game, when you're sitting in the position that Indiana is sitting in or that we're sitting in, and say, okay, I'm going to change a lot of the things that we do. You gotta buy in to what you've done the whole year to get you where you're at and really double down.

So more than anything, double down on our process. Our guys have been a part of big games. When you play in the BIG TEN, you're going to be a part of big games. And every game can go different. Every game has a life of itself.

So that's what we have to be able to do is focus on our process, be really obsessed with the details going into a game like this and put your players in a position to have success.

**Q. I just wanted to know what you both think of the significance that all four coaches left in the playoffs worked for Coach Saban, and just the connectivity, even though you guys were all there at different times, that everyone is connected to him.**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, yeah. Four for four. I think everybody learned a lot from Nick. He was a great mentor, very organized, detailed; had a plan for everything. Managed lead, how to stop complacency, game day, recruiting, recruiting evaluation, player evaluation. I mean, he had it all. And if you were serious about your career and wanted to be a head coach one day, you took great notes or great mental notes.

So I felt like after one year with Coach Saban, that I had learned more about how to run a program than I maybe did the previous 27 as an assistant coach, and stayed with him for three more years. So there's a lot of disciples out there doing well, and that's why he's the greatest of all time.

DAN LANNING: Yeah, I just echo that. In my time, I was working at Sam Houston State before I went to Alabama and was going to take a pay cut to go be a GA there. And when anybody asked me why, I said, I'm going to get my doctorate in football. And that's what I feel like working for Coach Saban, just like Coach said, you learn so much. Things I thought I knew, I realized I didn't know anything. And I got to really carry that over with the opportunity to work with Coach Smart, who built off of that as well at Georgia. And that was an unbelievable experience for me, and obviously it shows here as we enter the semifinals.

**Q. This is for both coaches. You both mentioned about kind of entertaining recruits while you're trying**

**to coach for a semifinal position here, and I'm just curious, with all of these -- everyone coming in in January, how much significantly better do you think teams are from all of the chaos that's created from it?**

DAN LANNING: Yeah. What I'll say is our players -- you know, I don't know if it makes you better dealing with what we're dealing with, but what it has made football teams and what it's made coaches and players is we can handle chaos, and we're really malleable. We understand that college football right now is about change. There's going to be a lot of change. The teams that can do the best at adapting and handling what's thrown at you. We don't make the rules; we just have to adapt to them, and our guys handle that. They're tough kids.

They can handle the chaos of a schedule. As much as we can keep it similar and consistent for them, as much as we can be open and honest with them, I think they can handle almost anything you pitch at them, and really, coaching staffs are built that way now, too. There's a lot of things going on. We're dealing with two coaches on our staff that are going on to be head coaches, and the timing isn't necessarily perfect, but it's been done before, and it's a great challenge.

So I think if you look at the chaos in football and look at it as a challenge for your players and for your coaching staff, you build people that are resilient; you build people that are adaptable, and you build an organize that withstand a lot of the changes that exist.

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah. I'd agree with that totally. You gotta adjust, adapt and improvise and be light on your feet. I'm not sure it necessarily affects the current team at all because the schedule will be the schedule. It obviously influences the '26 roster quite a bit. I think that's what you're seeing is a lot of new faces on every team across the country. Players have a lot more options and the ability to improve their brand.

It puts a little more stress on the coaching staff. Right now this time of year, if you're still playing -- and there's only four of us really playing in the playoffs. There might be a couple other bowl games remaining. So I guess the teams that aren't playing maybe have a little bit more of an advantage right now from a recruiting standpoint. But you gotta make time for it. You gotta get it done, do the best you can. But the focus primarily has to be on preparation for this game.

**Q. Coach Lanning, how have you seen your defense continue to evolve throughout the course of the season through the wins and even through the playoff run both physically and mentally?**

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DAN LANNING: Growth has been pretty standard. It's been pretty consistent for our team throughout. Like I said, none of the teams that are still around have not gotten better. We've improved. We're tackling at a higher clip. But it wasn't even two games ago that we didn't tackle that well versus JMU. So we got a lot to work on. We got a lot to improve. We're nowhere near the finished product, and that's part of what makes the game of football great is that there's always room to get better.

Even in the game, you could look at the scoreboard of our last game and say, oh, we played unbelievable defense, and I can tell you five things we gotta do better right now from that game. So for us it's about consistent improvement and continue to attack what we can do better as a staff and as a team.

**Q. Curt, are you letting players that go to the portal or planning to go into the portal kind of stay with the team through the CFP? And then you mentioned obviously the challenges, kind of hosting of all those transfers. With the portal open this round, kind of what's the key to sort of balancing -- you mentioned obviously game plan has gotta come first, but how have you tried to approach it with the staff to try to manage that workload and all the things that you have to get accomplished?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah. We've had a few players go in the portal, and we would like them to continue to practice. A few have chosen to go home and won't be with us this week. I don't think that's going to present a problem for us in terms of our preparation.

The thing about the portal guys, they're a little different than the high school guys. They don't need 48 hours on campus. It's usually one night, they're making a business decision. They're normally older guys. They've been through it. They know what they're looking for. Either you're a fit or you're not.

And so from a coach's standpoint, like yesterday, because we got back at 3:30 in the morning from the Rose Bowl, I gave the coaches and players off. Now, I came in. I was in the office about eight or nine hours because I knew what I was looking at here.

The position coaches may have one, two, three guys in at their position that they'll have to have a position meeting with, whereas, I'm going to have to visit with 12, 13 guys, right?

So I knew I was going to lose six, seven, eight hours, so I tried to make that up yesterday. And I have a few

meetings this evening and a few tomorrow morning, and then it'll be 100 percent focus on our prep.

**Q. For both coaches, both your teams play with an abundance of confidence. How do you develop that? How do you get your players to feel that way and just the importance of that?**

DAN LANNING: Players create confidence. Coaches support it. Right? They go out there by doing it, and winning and failing. You make mistakes, and then you challenge yourself to say, okay, I don't want to make the same mistake again.

And mistakes can be a really good thing, especially when you have the self-awareness to recognize it. And you'd like those mistakes to happen in practice, and then you'd like to have guys that are hungry enough to say, okay, I'm really good at this. Let me not spend all my time in practice working on this. Let me go work on what I'm not good at.

And once you start doing that, whether it's a quarterback seeing the coverage or it's a defensive lineman trying to work a certain technique and you can create repetition, you can create confidence.

CURT CIGNETTI: I think confidence and belief come from when you're prepared, totally prepared and get the result you're looking for. That's why it's important to have a blueprint and a plan. This business is all about development, recruiting and retention. Gotta have high standards, expectations, accountability throughout your entire organization. Gotta have the right people on your staff and in the locker room. And you improve every single day.

Like this week, it'll be important that we can stack meetings, practices and days so that, you know, we're totally prepared to play one to 150 at 7:30 on Friday night and then play the way we want them to play.

And I think when guys prepare correctly, that's their best chance to be successful. And when they become successful, they develop more confidence and belief, and it becomes sort of a snowball effect.

And that's the way it's worked for us, but it's always been in the here and now, controlling the controllables, focused on your preparation, eliminating the noise and the clutter so that you go in 100 percent prepared, which gives yourself the best chance of being successful.

**Q. Dan, who takes over as the No. 2 nickel and dime right now? And as much as you've been leaning on Jadon, do you have to lean on him that much more,**

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**almost like Tysheem a year ago, with you guys getting thinner in the last 24 hours?**

DAN LANNING: Yeah, I'm probably going to play it, James. But if I'm not able to go, we'll put one of the other coaches out there.

**Q. Coach Cignetti, I know you challenged Fernando to not allow the Heisman moment to play into the way he played at the Rose Bowl, and I suspect you were pretty happy with the way he handled everything, but what is your impression of how he managed through that whole process and how he performed, given the Heisman label at the Rose Bowl?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah. He did a great job preparing, likes he always does. He was the same guy. We had not played a game in three-and-a-half weeks. So maybe the speed of the game, the first play of the game, you know, was a play he normally would have made, and then they did an all-out blitz and kind of got us on third down.

But after that, I mean, he was tremendous. He had more touchdown passes than incompletions. He used his legs to make plays like he's done all year, and he was 100 percent on point.

And then we got the run game going and we didn't need his arm quite as much. He hit the clock, get out of the game. And I'd give him an A plus. He's player of the game on offense.

**Q. Dan, you've talked about some of the difficulties that the schedule presents with the transfer portal right now. What are those conversations like with players when you're hoping that they might stay around and act as rotational piece for you, but also know that they need their own self-interest in mind and have other things to do with the portal?**

DAN LANNING: Each one is different. There's some guys that come in, and I share the same sentiment as them, you know, that they might have an opportunity to be able to make an impact somewhere else. Some guys come in and you hate to see them go.

We've been really fortunate to be able to hang on to the players that we really want to be here and have success. And some of them you see them walk out the door and you just hope that they have a better opportunity wherever they move next.

The grass isn't always greener, and that's something you have to figure out in life at times, but that's one of the life lessons that exists right now in college ball. But every

conversation is different. The one thing that I expect from our guys is to have that conversation.

**Q. Coach Cignetti, this is for you. I wanted to get your thoughts on Pat Coogan, the way he played. We didn't get a chance to ask you specifically, but as a coach, your thoughts on seeing your center win offensive MVP of the Rose Bowl.**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, the MVP of the Rose Bowl, in my mind, was the whole offensive line, and Pat Coogan is one of the leaders on the offensive line. I think Kirk Herbstreit said that he had a big role in choosing him, and he made a good decision. But I thought our line played really well, very aggressive, snapped the whistle, finished plays. And Coogan, of course, is making all the calls and a key guy there, and he played well.

He played well also, but in general, we did a really nice job of protecting the quarterback. There were a couple of situations. But in the run game we got that going. Our backs ran really hard. Our receivers blocked. And it was a good day on offense.

**Q. I wanted to follow up on Fernando. You've talked about his ability to kind of move in the pocket and be mobile enough to extend plays. How valuable is it, though, I think he had something like five scrambles in the Rose Bowl and four went for first downs and one might have been design, but some of those were also maybe him taking those opportunities.**

How far does it change what a quarterback can kind of do for an offense when even if not maybe he's a full dual threat guy like Fernando, he can just keep extending plays and he can always threaten a defense with sort of productive runs?

CURT CIGNETTI: To me that's the winning edge. I mean, when you look at a quarterback, obviously he's gotta have throwing ability and be able to process, but the ability to extend plays, whether it's with his legs or once he's out of the pocket with his arm, his eyes down field, I mean, that's the key. A guy that cannot extend plays, you really become vulnerable. And Fernando's ability to make plays with his legs, boy, I can't even count the number of times in big games this year where his legs have come through and extended drives.

**Q. This is for both coaches. This will obviously be the third straight year that a BIG TEN team one way or another from either of you will make it to the National Championship game, I think fourth time in the last five years. What do you feel like that says about the BIG TEN conference and what it's been able to do in the**

**last handful of years and how do you feel like your conference schedule has really helped prepare you guys to be able to achieve a feat like this?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I've only been in the league two years. So I'm not sure I'm the one to answer this question. I know that Michigan won it three years ago. That was a great football team. Ohio State was equally as great last season.

You got two teams playing in the semis. So one of us is going to be in the National Championship game, and I certainly hope the BIG TEN can claim that prize.

Oregon is a great football team. But the BIG TEN is a great conference, a lot of good teams top to bottom. And that's a great thing about the playoffs. You give 12 teams a chance to win it all, and at the end of the day there's one standing.

DAN LANNING: Yeah, I just share the sentiment. I've been a part of the SEC, just like Coach Cignetti has. I've been a part of the old PAC-12. I've been a part of a bunch of different conferences, and it's hard to argue that anybody is doing it better right now than the BIG TEN. There's some quality from top to bottom.

Obviously, the National Championship teams have come from this conference the last two years, and the landscape has changed. Certainly five years ago there wasn't a conference that was rolling and dominating, and I think the way you indicate that is the success of the teams in the conference. And there's a lot of teams that have had success, and a variety of different teams. Coach just mentioned it, but we saw Michigan, and Washington a couple years ago in the National Championship game. You see Ohio State. This year you'll see a different BIG TEN team. And I think that speaks to the quality and the strength of the conference overall.

**Q. This is for both coaches. You guys are traveling. Dan, you went from Oregon to Miami, back to Oregon, to Georgia. And Coach Cignetti, you went out to California. How difficult is the travel on both the schedule and then recovery of your athletes?**

DAN LANNING: It's not bad.

MODERATOR: All right. Coach Cignetti.

CURT CIGNETTI: I'll echo that sentiment. (Laughs).

MODERATOR: All right. I don't know that we can end on that.

**Q. We've heard a lot about the transfer portal and name, image and likeness and all those pieces, but when we're looking at the culture of these teams, just what you can say to that effect, the family over self, because there's a reason why you get to where you get to and to have success like you've both had. So what you can say about culture and family over simply just looking at the individual self.**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think when you look at our team, you got a number of veterans, guys that have played a lot of football, but high-character guys that are good players. And this is a very, very close team, that plays for one another, trusts one another. And I mean, we got a lot of guys on this football team that are going to do real well in life. And this is a special group.

DAN LANNING: Yeah, I'd share the same sentiment. I think to get to this point in the season, culture is a word that's overused, certainly, in our sport. But you don't get to this point if you're not able to be selfless, and those are the lessons you try to teach in football.

You have to think of the group and the team over yourself. And to be at this point, that means there's a lot of players that made that decision, and you have to realize that individual success is going to come from team success.

I think if you look at both of our teams, you see a lot of guys that are having a ton of individual success, and it all started with somebody else around them helping them have that success. There's no great quarterback without great O line players. There's no great secondary play without great D line play, and that's what's great about the sport of football is the quicker your team can realize that, the team and connection are going to be separating factors, the quicker you're going to have success.

And we've certainly been able to create some of that here at Oregon, and obviously Indiana has been able to create the same thing.

MODERATOR: To both coaches, guys, I know it's a busy time. Thank you very much for your time this afternoon. We're off to a great start. Good luck with your prep, and we look forward to seeing you guys in a few days.

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