

CFP National Championship:

Miami vs Indiana

Sunday, January 18, 2026

Miami, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

Coach Mario Cristobal

Miami Hurricanes

Coach Curt Cignetti

Indiana Hoosiers

Coaches Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to be joined by Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti, and Miami head coach Mario Chris to balance. Coach Cignetti, we'll start with you for opening remarks when you're ready.

CURT CIGNETTI: Thank you. Great to be here in Miami. About a day and a half of preparation left to kind of sharpen the saw, so to speak. Really got a lot of respect for the Miami Hurricane organization football program. When you watch these guys on tape, they really play the game with tenacity, intensity, physical, relentless, get after it. Coach Cristobal has done a great job with that program, and it's going to be a huge challenge for our football team, and looking forward to the game.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Congratulations to Coach Cignetti and his football program for a tremendous season. Really appreciative of everyone involved surrounding this game for providing us with the amenities. Obviously we're at home so we get to use our own facilities, but everything else regarding preparation, which is so important. And proud of our players and looking forward to continuing our course of preparation for this opportunity.

Q. Mario, I'm wondering if you feel like the targeting rule that suspends a player for the first half of the next game if it happens in the second half should be revisited, considering the consequences it's going to have potentially for this game?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Certainly do. We feel it was unjustly administered, and now it impacts the last game of the season. We do have the ability, again, as an officiating crew and the powers that be to revisit that to give every team due process and their best ability to compete in this game.

Q. You hear coaches talk a lot about finding your



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whys. Why have you dedicated your life to football?

CURT CIGNETTI: I grew up the son of a coach. I was the oldest of four. Where he's from, everybody was a steelworker or coal miner, and it seemed like a pretty cool thing to do for a living. When we went to West Virginia in 1970 and I was on the sideline for all the home games, it was Bobby Bowden's first year as a head coach in West Virginia, I pretty much knew in my heart what I wanted to do. I don't know what else I would have done other than coach, to be honest with you.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I love football. I was a baseball player that wasn't very good and got cut. By the grace of God, Dennis Lavelle, head football coach of Columbus High School, was walking by the hallway said you should try and play football. Coach Jimmy Johnson scooped up my brother and I and offered us scholarships to University of Miami. We were able to be part of a historic run, and loved every aspect of it. Two parents that couldn't tell you what a first down was or what a touchdown was, but the ride they enjoyed with us, the journey they went on with us and the way our lives were impacted made me realize I wanted to be part of football and football part of my life for my career.

Q. For both coaches, your journeys have been different to get to this path, but just what you can say about maybe the most rewarding part of working with your specific student-athletes and what it's been like to lead this group this season to this final moment.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think it's twofold. I think oftentimes we don't mention the fact that I have learned -- we have learned as a staff as much from our players as we could ever teach them. That's awesome.

But the fact that you can alter the course and be the last pit stop for these young men as they go to the next step for the rest of their lives is legitimately impactful in so many ways and helps you be a better father, a better husband, a better leader, and I think that it also grants us the opportunity to impart some of that knowledge and some of those ways upon them, and hopefully they can carry that with them.

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CURT CIGNETTI: You know, we have a veteran team. These guys have started a lot of games. Big Ten Media Day, somebody mentioned that we had more career starts going into the season by far than any other team.

This group has tried to apply the message. To me, it's all about messaging and getting everybody to think alike, in terms of how we want to play on the field more so than any other group.

This group has great leadership, intelligence and character. They're extremely close. While all of our teams at the end of the year have ended up really, really good, I think this team has some special qualities, and their ability to go on the road and win close games, quarterback playing his best with the game on the line, when everything appeared to be down and out.

But there's one more chapter to write, and we're going to find out in about 36 hours.

Q. Mario, Rueben got hurt on the first or second play of the season last year, and he came back, but he wasn't this version of Rueben Bain. Do you think going through what he went through for those first few weeks last season kind of reinvigorated the joy in him a little bit as far as what the game means, and have you still seen that joy when he plays now?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Seems like every true competitor takes those setbacks and turns it into something positive that launches them and elevates their game and their spirit and their ability to be a great teammate, and I think this is a perfect case and an example of that.

Rueben Bain was born and raised down here in South Florida and was always a huge part of the community, and it was his dream to play for the Miami Hurricanes, and him watching on the sideline just stoked a fire in him where he just refused to be denied going forward.

Now that he's fully healthy, he dedicated himself this off-season to staying at his optimal weight, which is about 275, and trimmed down his body fat, certainly increased his lean muscle mass. He's become a great leader, and now he's, I would say, confident enough to be outspoken as a leader, as well, which is a massive step for him and his ability on this team and this community has been awesome.

Q. Your two programs have very different histories. I'm wondering what a National Championship would mean for each of your programs on Monday.

CURT CIGNETTI: It would mean we're the national champion.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: It would mean we're the national champions.

Q. What does winning look like besides the final score? What are you implementing into your players day in and day out?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Oh, you implement everything in that building that you do in your very own household. You know what comes up a lot nowadays, the question of how have you changed with the advent of the transfer portal and NIL and all that stuff. The answer is always the same. If you have to change the way you teach and coach and treat people because you fear an aspect that has been introduced to the game, you were never doing it right.

It's real simple for us. Every single day we pour every ounce of our existence into doing for our players exactly what we do for our very own sons and daughters in our households. Our very simple philosophy. It's not perfect, but certainly the intentions behind it will be.

CURT CIGNETTI: You know, I think the game of football, applied correctly, teamwork, leadership, commitment, discipline, work ethic, sacrifice, perseverance, resiliency, relentlessness, a lot of qualities that can help people become more successful later in life.

Q. Coach Cignetti, I wonder if you're expecting about 100 coaches to show up in Bloomington this spring to try to copy your blueprint, and do you see a lot of programs like Indiana under the radar that could be positioned to make a run like you have?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I'm sure we've got some people's attention. I'm not one to entertain visitors too much in the office. I prefer to watch tape and keep growing and learning.

I don't know really the answer to the second question. I think anything is possible with the right commitment, leadership, blueprint, plan and people.

Q. Coach Cignetti, growing up as a young kid with your dad around and some of the other legendary coaches you grew up with, Bobby Bowden and a young Nick Saban, what are some of the lessons you learned or even experiences that really impacted you as a young whippersnapper that really stuck with you?

CURT CIGNETTI: You know, I think my dad was a great leader, but he led by example. He had a certain presence

to him. He had a great work ethic and discipline. He overcame cancer twice, my senior year of high school when he was a head coach at West Virginia. He was given his last rites twice. Never really got to quite finish what he started there.

Coach Bowden, I can vividly remember a game at Maryland at halftime in the locker room, something that will stick with me forever in terms of him and the team. I'm not going to share that message.

But I just think I learned a lot from my dad and the game. Always knew what I wanted to do and drew from every person throughout my career, assistant and head coach. While my journey is very unique, I think it did prepare me for this particular opportunity and the changes that have taken place in college football.

Q. What was it like to walk off the practice field for the final time yesterday knowing how much these players have put into it, physically, mentally, emotionally throughout the course of an entire season and what they're putting off physically to reach this level? What's kind of the bond and the love that each one of you have for your teams and the players and what they've experienced?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, yesterday was a typical Thursday practice and I think the processes themselves are no different than any other Thursday, but every team is unique. Every one is uniquely special and different and has brought something different to the lives of all the people around them.

But I don't see us getting caught up in any nostalgic moments or whatnot. I just really sense that our team was really focused, that they were really intent on carrying out the rest of the day's processes, knowing the tremendous opportunity that we have. That's how we closed out the evening, and that's how we got ready this morning to go and continue our process.

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I think leading up to this game, there's been a lot of pro Indiana hype, a lot of rat poison out there. I happened to see holy rose thing on social media this morning about our guys hugging each other at the end of practice. It is a close team. I've witnessed quite a bit of sentimentalism throughout the week from some of our seniors who we've been with quite a long time.

I think it's time to sharpen the saw now, throw those warm fuzzies out the door, that sentimentalism. It's time to go play a game against a great opponent.

We've got to have a sharp edge going into this game. You

don't go to war with warm milk and cookies.

Q. Coach Cristobal, much has been made about the transfer portal, but when you look at the guys that are having an impact on your team this year, many of them are recruits and hometown guys when you think about Mark, Malachi, Rueben and the like. Talk about still the importance of recruiting high school athletes, especially locally, as well.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I mean, it's always at the core of your program. You like to have people come in when they're just starting to learn and understand what it is to play at the college level and become a student-athlete at the collegiate level, as well.

I think the best part about what college football is now with all the things we have to fix is the fact that they're introduced to a very diverse locker room, right. And if you look at Miami and the city and our program and all floors, where the coaches are, development staff, academics, we come in every size, shape, skin color, ethnicity, speak just about every single language, and it's awesome.

When your local guys become prominent players it really galvanizes the community, but I think what's helped us continue to elevate is the fact that we're very national, and we've come from all over, and here people are accepted and people are driven, and if they love to work hard, if they are high achieving mentalities, if they care about doing things the right way and pushing themselves in the classroom and on the field, then they're going to get along great. And that's what I think we're starting to see a lot more of, and that was the initial challenge to get us going and thinking in that direction.

I'm not sure if I answered your question, but I hope that kind of encompasses a little bit about the local plus the out-of-state guys.

Q. Yesterday I spoke with Carson Beck, and we talked about his experiences with playing in the National Championship, and as you guys know, this isn't anything new for him. He's done this before twice, has two rings and soon to be three. You spoke about mentality. Talk to me about Carson Beck's leadership with leading this Miami team.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I'm a big believer of Carson Beck. Like him, our entire team on November 1, 2025, did not have very much positive energy surrounding them.

I think Carson Beck epitomizes the ability to take an adverse situation and turn it into something not only positive but something that helps one grow and endure and

become a stronger and better version of themselves.

I think he's the most experienced player in the College Football Playoffs, and I think that since the day he arrived, and this shows again how savvy and how experienced he is, he couldn't participate in spring ball, but yet every walkthrough, every meeting, anything post-practice, pre-practice, anything outside of football, he was very much spearheading gatherings, opportunities to galvanize the entire team so that they understood and knew not only did he know what he was doing and that he was a high-level player but that he was willing to do anything for the team.

That's his only concern. He's not very -- he's not caught up in personal accolades or awards. He wants to win, and he's willing to do anything to win.

Q. For Coach Cignetti, first of all, you have a chance tomorrow night to do something that Bob Knight did, and that's go undefeated and untied to win the National Championship. What are your thoughts about Bob Knight, to begin with, and what you have to a chance to do tomorrow night? Because obviously he's revered on that campus.

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, it was 50 years ago, as a matter of fact, and I was a big Bob Knight fan as a little kid. I liked sort of the shenanigans and the faces at the press conferences and throwing the chair across the court. I thought that was pretty cool. And the guy I bought my house from was a big friend of Bob Knight, actually.

But it really has no effect on what's going to take place here at 7:50 tomorrow night. But it was 50 years ago, and if we're able to climb that mountain, it'll be a unique coincidence.

Q. Mario, you obviously entered the tournament as the No. 10 seed. How much did that drive you to prove a lot of people wrong, that you certainly believed you deserve to be where you're going to be at tomorrow night to finish the job? Because a lot of times people use that as motivation to get to a tournament.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yes, sir. I don't think the external stuff has ever been a motivator for our team. I think it's always been internal. I think our guys always want to prove themselves right, and I think the confidence and the trust in each other was something that just continued to build momentum throughout the course of the season, and it was a matter of just finally looking at each other, looking in the mirror and making a commitment to work out the details to allow us to win in the margins just because college football nowadays the margins are so small. If you

don't own those details, you're going to get your butt beat on any given day.

I think it was all that. I think it was internally driven, and proud of them for that. But I think there's an appetite and there's an acknowledgment that there's a lot more improvement to be had and to be made, and I think that we've worked really hard over the course of the playoffs to continually get better.

Q. For both coaches, with the transfer portal having been open for the past few weeks, how do you ensure that that buzz around the portal doesn't distract your team and players?

CURT CIGNETTI: I think we're beyond that point now. The first weekend it opened where you could have official visitors and had commitments, I had to deal with it the following day very briefly, and after that I thought we were fine. It's a reality of college football, and I think the players understand it's a reality. It doesn't mean they accept or respond to the consequences of it very well all the time, but I don't see it as a big issue.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: You handle it like you handle everything. You handle it with honesty and transparency and put your cards on the table and do your best to get people to put their cards on the table and operate from that standpoint. I think anything outside of that, whatever way it works out, it was meant to be.

Q. Coach Cristobal, when you were recruited by Miami, you said Michael Irvin said some choice words to you that inspired you to become a Miami Hurricane. Recently Michael Irvin kissed you on national TV --

MARIO CRISTOBAL: On the cheek, by the way.

Q. Have you sat down with Michael and set some boundaries? Or as long as you're winning, Michael Irvin can do whatever he wants to do?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I'd rather not get kissed by Michael Irvin. He was a great teammate. In fact, he was one of the kind of hosts when I was on an official visit at the University of Miami. That was a day and age that I don't know if it'll ever be duplicated, and I say all the time, I'm a nobody. I'm a local kid that by the grace of God, Gary Stevens believed in my brother and I and brought us over to the University of Miami, and Jimmy Johnson gave us a scholarship. Again, it changed everything.

But I went to practices all the time, and I was so attracted to that brotherhood. Like I wanted to be one of those dawgs. Those guys were dawgs. They were competitors.



They were relentless, and I wanted to be part of it. I just didn't know if I was ever going to be good enough. So I was excited but I was terrified.

I soon learned that once you were part of that brotherhood, you're forever different. I think unless you're a Miami Hurricane, that's hard to understand.

Seeing all those guys come back, and not just the Hall of Famers and the popular guys but the third- and fourth-string guy that maybe never got a chance to play but is doing so well in life and has an awesome family, seeing all these guys come back after 20 years of not being around and really not having the support that Miami needed, I think it's awesome. Our players love seeing them.

They know that coaches coach and that -- the whole kiss thing, I'm never going to live that down. Look, that guy is a brother to me. So are all those guys. We're very honored and fortunate to have them with us for the ride.

Q. As you guys head into the last game of the 2025-2026 season, how would you describe your team's identity?

CURT CIGNETTI: You're talking about final preparation until kickoff? Is that what you're talking about?

For us, it's a typical Friday, day before a game. We have a certain thing we do before game 1, game 6, we'll do before this game. It's my job to do everything I can to make sure our team is totally prepared and has the right mindset going in so they can put it on the field and play 1 to 150. So today will be no different than any other Friday before a Saturday game.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Yeah, it's pretty much the same response. It's Friday, and Friday has its own process, the things that we do, and certainly we're not going to break those things. I think our players wouldn't expect anything else.

Q. Coach Cignetti, the National Championship game is a challenge, obviously, in and of itself, the fact that you will be on Miami's sideline, but in the stadium that they call home. What sort of extra motivator is that, that this is -- I know your alumni travel extremely well, but this is going to be considered a road game for you guys. What sort of motivator is that for your kids?

CURT CIGNETTI: I'm not sure it's a motivator. It is what it is; it's factual. This is where Miami plays their home football games, and we're playing a game against them with a lot on the line. That's it, plain and simple.

Q. Mario, you had the very unique opportunity of playing for National Championships as a player, and now you're doing it as a head coach. How is the experience the same, different? Is one more meaningful than the other?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I mean, it's process right now, and I hate to give you a boring answer. I do. I know that certainly haven't lit up this press conference by any stretch. But it's what we do.

I think that when you -- I think certain things you reflect upon after the season and when it's done. There's no value right now in getting off course, in getting off your process.

That's where the entire focus is. That's what the mentality has always been, and that's what it is today and all the way through tomorrow. Then after that, I think the question will probably have a more eventful response.

Q. Coach Cignetti, what kind of challenge does Miami's defensive line give you guys on Monday?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I think that's where it all starts in football is up front on both sides of the ball. I think very impressive. They're deep. They're twitchy. They're strong. They're violent. I know Corey likes that word "violent."

They're philosophically very similar to us in terms of disruption, TFLs, sacks, stop the run, they just do it a little different way. The ends are premier players. The inside guys are very, very good. They're two deep everywhere, and they're hard to block. They do a nice job of tying the whole package in to keep you off balance, and they'll be a big challenge.

Q. Coach Cristobal, as you were training and studying to become a secret service agent, can you describe how tormented you were internally when you kept thinking about your love of football, and what was that moment like when you finally decided you were going to chase that dream?

MARIO CRISTOBAL: It was something that I kind of always envisioned myself doing, working for the Federal Government. I loved every aspect of it. My family has always been in law enforcement, law enforcement, teachers, construction workers. That's kind of what you do. Come to this country, take two jobs, go to night school. Not me, my parents, obviously.

But I wanted to be in, and I honestly took the GA job



hoping that I could coach one day. But not knowing.

It's almost like, man, I'll never have a shot to do so. Once you're in, you get your first taste of it, and back then there was only one GA. Now there's 44 analysts on each side of the ball. Back then you had to do every card. I had done every single ounce of film, making about \$1.70 an hour, working 22-hour days and a glutton for punishment. I loved it.

I remember being at the Gator Bowl with a bunch of the players, Young -- you might know these names -- Reggie Wayne, Santana Moss, Ed Reed. Those guys were young pups. And back then didn't have a cell phone, got a pager, call so-and-so special agent, assistant to the special agent, Secret Service Miami for your appointment to come on in and join, and that's when it hit you, like whoa.

But slept on it. I woke up in a panic. I love football. I've always loved football. Didn't really play for anybody else or want it for anybody -- I just loved it. And I wasn't willing to let that opportunity go again. By the grace of God, I was able to move my stuff back to my GA office, which Davis Larry Coker took me back and gave me the opportunity.

Q. When you look back at both of your teams from where you started at the beginning of the year to where you are today, what would you say is the biggest internal growth that you see, and what makes you most proud of all of them?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, the first play of the game in our opener, Old Dominion went 80 yards for a touchdown on a quarterback run, so we were down 7-0, just like that.

I think we've built on our successes. Success brings belief, which brings confidence and more success, and repetition -- repetition is the mother of learning, you get better. With some big road game wins, we developed more belief and confidence that we were a resilient football team and could overcome any kind of expected challenge.

So I think the team grew quite a bit and has put itself in position to be where we are today.

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think game 1 opened up our eyes. I think the entire country expected us not to do well against a great team in Notre Dame. That built our confidence in a big-time way and had us going the right way. And we got field rushed in Dallas over at SMU, and reality hit, and everyone on our football program saw that graphic, that edit, Miami has a 5 percent chance to make it into the postseason.

I think that's what galvanized us. I think we realized we

had to approach each and every day with being the most excited, the most energetic team on the field and that pre-snap and post-snap discipline had to be at the forefront and that ball security couldn't be compromised and neither could ball disruption, that you had to be physical and find a way to out-hit your opponent on every single play.

It had to mean more to you than it did to the other side, and I think those principles just continued to push us forward so that if we practiced in that manner, then we could earn the right to cut it loose on game day. As those games have come on, we have gotten better and better and still have a lot to improve, and looking forward to tomorrow night.

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