

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Curt Cignetti

Signing Day Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: What's up, guys? I tell you, I feel rusty. It's been a while. Been doing too much recruiting. I got to polish up on my media again (smiling).

Signing day sure has changed. We signed them all up in December. Used to be that this was the big day. We spent all January really seeing '25s who you cannot legally talk with, identifying '26s, getting out and about pretty good. I think we got a lot done.

This time of year, always give the coaches a few days off, come back Tuesday ready to go. I'll get away. Don't want to get away, but my wife convinced me I need to get away. I'll enjoy that. Rather be watching tape, to be honest with you. Then it will be all ball.

Looking forward to spring ball. Players have been doing a good job down in the weight room with Derek out on the field, strength and speed. Looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. I wanted to ask you, the recruiting department there, got overhauled since last season. When you started your search for new guys, what were you looking for? What intrigued you about Matt Wilson?

CURT CIGNETTI: I was looking for good structure, capable people. Put together an organization that was strong in evaluation and marketing. I think we're extremely strong in evaluation.

Impressed with Matt. Have known him a long time. Had some good discussions with him. We've hired really good people underneath him: Mike Ferrara, John Srofe. Two veteran guys. I like the way that's going right now.

It's a critical component in terms of expediting the evaluation and identifying people, both within the state and a four-hour radius, and those out-of-pocket areas.

Q. With spring practice kind of establishing a plan and a structure, what have you found are the keys to

getting the most out of it? Anything unique about your approach? What have you learned over the years to try to maximize spring camp?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, there's no scoreboard, so everybody has a great spring. You want to develop players, get your offense, defense, special teams systems in, see improvement on a daily basis, keep guys healthy, don't get anybody injured.

Usually in spring, the second half of spring looks a lot better than the first half of spring. There's going to be a lot of new nomenclature, new people, a different practice structure than the guys that have been here in the past are accustomed to.

I think all the coaches are really excited to get going, but we still have a month of offensive and defensive staff meetings coming up to get everybody on the same page. Three new defensive guys on that side of the ball. Bob Bostad is new on the offensive side of the ball. We still have some things to get done there.

But looking forward to getting out on the field.

Q. When you think back to your first spring, going through this process in other jobs, what are the things, whether from coaches, strength staff, talking about progress, that you draw from when you start building your plan for spring, start building your goals?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, well, I mean, I don't think the schedules have changed a whole lot through the years. We sort of have a blueprint and a way of doing things, a way we practice, getting the players accustomed to the way we practice: up-tempo, fast, organized, constant movement.

All you're looking for is sort of individual development, but start to build that kind of team identity, this is who we are, this is how we practice, this is how we play, this is how we play every play, fast, physical, relentless, finish one play at a time, six seconds a play, every play has a life and a history of its own. Finish, not affected by success, not affected by failure, on to the next play.



You get ready in practice that way beginning of spring, fall camp, getting them playing that way in the game. In those close games, you're doing your thing, 11 guys doing their job. It's not addition, it's multiplication. You don't have a guy, I've got to make a play, affected by the circumstances of the game.

That's what we try to establish at the beginning. That normally takes time with a new team. They don't get it at first. A lot of times when you inherit a team, it's who wins the drill, who wins the play. That's not really kind of the purpose. We're just trying to get consistency and performance play at a high level play in, play out.

Q. You mentioned right now your team is kind of in the hands of your head strength and conditioning staff. What kind of feedback are you getting from them so far? Is it the response that you're hoping to see so far?

CURT CIGNETTI: Derek Owings is a guy I got a lot of confidence in. Strength and conditioning has really changed through the years. It's become a very scientific thing. I think he's on the cutting edge, gets great results. I have 100% confidence in him. I don't mess with him. That's his area. I let him go.

I know the players really like what we're doing down there. He changes their bodies. He'll cut a lot of body fat, still add lean muscle mass, quicker, stronger, faster, more explosive. I've seen the results.

You look at the GPS numbers sort of here last year, relative to maybe where we were the year before. He'll make 'em faster. I think a lot of the guys came in and adapted well, particularly the guys that were used to the program, like the JMU guys, for instance, P5 transfers. It took some of the guys that were returning from this squad last year a little while.

Everybody is caught up now and all the reports are good.

Q. Similar question about Derek Owings. When you think about the James Madison teams you had the last few years, are there a few aspects of those teams that he helped develop what you saw maybe from day one of spring practice till the end of the year that got significantly better?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, the off-season is his baby. Right now and then in the summer. Now, we'll still maintain and do things during spring ball, fall camp, during the season.

I think he's a big part of what we do. That's why I do

everything I can to keep him on the roster, pay him as well as I can, because he makes a difference. Fast, physical, fast and physical. It starts down in that weight room with the development, the body development, of each and every guy.

He's a winning edge. I think our guys are seeing that downstairs right now.

Q. You've added some what I would call NFL, front office type roles here, personnel, GM-type roles. How important has that become for you over the last three or four years as things have changed?

CURT CIGNETTI: I think it's really important here because everybody has it, too. You always want to have an edge on the competition, or at least have what they have. The evaluation process being timely, getting guys identified, evaluated in real-time, it's critical. I think we're real strong there right now.

Q. A few of the Sunbelt guys you added, from Troy, Old Dominion, what did you see from them when you were preparing for them prior to playing them this year, and maybe why are you confident that can translate to success here?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, Troy played great defense. They were a hard-nosed team like we were at JMU. Jon Sumrall, I always respected the way they played defense. McDonald was a good player for them, highly productive.

The two ODU guys we were position and need guys. We were really thin back there. Probably still need that, a piece or two, after spring ball. They both played well, had a lot of tackles, good production, all Sunbelt-type honors. We liked what we saw on tape, thought they could help us. Looking forward to seeing 'em.

Q. You guys are obviously not just planning for today, but tomorrow. You recently got commitments from a couple of 2025 guys. Both of them what I would call regional. How important is it to establish those relationships? What has the reception been like from the coaches and programs?

CURT CIGNETTI: Huge. It's huge. I mean, I don't care if you're the head coach at Indiana, Texas or Idaho, you got to do a great job in your state. We want to dominate our state best we can. I made every effort to get out there and into the key schools in January, meet people, talk with prospects, et cetera.

Okay, after your state, now it's the border states, those two- to four-hour pockets where there's population, players,



Cincinnati, Dayton, Chicago, St. Louis, Nashville, Louisville, Detroit, which is five hours. There's players scattered in the Midwest, southwest Michigan, et cetera.

To me, that's where it all begins, especially in this day and age with the transfer portal. Guys that grew up watching Big Ten football are more apt to stay in the program four or five years than people that didn't have the bond with the Big Ten.

The distance guys, those are the ones you see go in the portal a little bit more often. That doesn't mean an Indiana guy can't go in the portal, we all know he can. Still, you got to be strong in your state. You got to be strong in the border states, that four-hour radius. Then you got your distance areas.

Q. You mentioned in an interview that you haven't used all of spring practices or fall practices in the past. What goes into determining how many practices you hold? Is that a fluid situation?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, in this particular case, it was the Indy 500, what do they call it here, Little 500. That was our best available date to have our spring game, which is going to leave us with 13 practices, which I'm fine with. You can get done what you need to get done in 13 practices.

Fall camp has been kind of the same way. Never really used 25. Never used 20 hours in the week. Sometimes less is more. More isn't always more. That's the maximum amount they give you. That doesn't mean you have to use 'em all.

Q. Coming in, you've done this obviously before, a new program. What have you done the first couple months to build bonds, growing relationships with all these new players?

CURT CIGNETTI: December, honestly, I mean, I walked in kind of a crisis roster situation. We had 10 offensive starters in the portal, a number of defensive guys, 25 guys total. We were rebuilding and making the roster.

I hate to ever say I was pleased because you can never be pleased and satisfied, but I thought we got a lot of good work done in December and changed the roster, which I'm very optimistic about, what we got done in the transfer portal. Then in January, we're out on the road recruiting '25.

We haven't been around the kids a lot. Derek has been around the kids all the time. The brief moments I've been back in the office, I try to get down to the weight room, see the guys, see how they're doing, things like that. We'll get

an opportunity to spend more time with them now.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Pat Kuntz. A lot of people talk about the energy he brings to coaching. Where do you see that come from? What does that look like on the field, recruiting trail? How has he brought that energy to the job?

CURT CIGNETTI: That's just Pat Kuntz, man. He's a fireball. He loves football. He loves coaching. He loves being on the field. He gets after it in recruiting. He's a high-energy guy. Probably has been his whole life. That's just the way he's wired.

He's come a long way as a coach in the three years he's been with me. He's been a tremendous asset.

Q. You mentioned when you brought in the January guys, they knew about winning, getting championships, your culture. How important when you guys get into the summertime, you can't be around the players as much, there are player-led practices, what do those guys bring to this team?

CURT CIGNETTI: All the things you just said. I mean, they're important now. They were important the first day of workouts. When Derek took 'em out there, the other guys saw those guys, the way they lifted, the way they ran. They were ahead of a lot of guys in terms of their conditioning level. They sort of set a standard.

But we've got a lot of guys that are excelling in that program now. You just can't have enough guys in your program that think right, that think like champions.

Look, let's just face it, the last three years here there hasn't been a lot of success, okay? You bring in a bunch of people that have had a ton of success, and that's only going to help your football team.

Q. You mentioned maybe needing other defensive backs or two or a safety or two. Anywhere else that you kind of view maybe looking at help in the spring or is that dependent on how the spring goes, what you see from the performance and production?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, assuming we stay healthy in the spring, and there will be a number, probably a handful of key guys not participating in the spring, more on defense than offense, because of post-season surgery. Carpenter, for one. Jailin Walker. Carr. Sneed. Kidwell on offense. I'm probably forgetting somebody.

I think offensively on paper we look like we're in pretty good shape right now. Defensively, maybe some depth in

some areas. Evaluate the back end, do we have what we need going into the fall.

Look, if the NCAA doesn't change this multiple transfer rule back, you're looking at another transfer wave in May like you had in December. I don't think it will be as big, but you'll have people coming and going. That's just football right now.

Q. Do you want to see any changes in the calendar in terms of the multiple windows, how that works?

CURT CIGNETTI: I don't have a strong feeling about that. You tell me what the rules are and I'll thrive within the rules.

Q. I wanted to ask about Coach Sunseri added (indiscernible) collaboration between him and Coach Shanahan has been long-standing. How do you see those two work together, how they collaborate, connecting that quarterback position with the wider offense, what you need from them as you settle into spring practices, building the offense?

CURT CIGNETTI: I don't really see Tino's role changing. He's coaching the quarterbacks. I added that title. He's earned that title. It's a group effort in the meetings. I sort of run the offensive staff meetings, steer the direction. But I let those guys coach the guys on the field. I sort of coach coaches.

We've got a core offense. We'll put that core offense in. As we evaluate the team and its strengths, we'll start to branch off.

But that doesn't really take place until maybe halfway through fall camp. Once you get in season... We have to figure out who's who and who can do what first.

Q. When you guys are hitting the recruiting trail as a staff, what have your biggest obstacles been and how did you overcome that?

CURT CIGNETTI: I don't know that there's any particular obstacle. We got to change the way people think about Indiana. We've been adamant that, look, we're going to win and we're going to win this year and we're going to change the brand and the expectation level and the way people see Indiana football.

We've had three junior days. Usually I start out by saying, Look, anything you know about Indiana football, any perception you have, you need to erase the tape because here's what it's going to look like.

But we've got to do it on the field. When you're successful on the field, then you start to change the way the public, the state, the Big Ten and the country think about Indiana football. You start putting more people in the stands, selling out games, then it's hard to get tickets. That's what we're going to do.

You got to be good in football because that's where the revenue comes from, man, football. There's no reason we can't be successful here. We're going to be successful here. It's one day at a time. It's a process right now. It's always a process.

Thanks.

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