

# Indiana University Football

## Media Conference

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Bloomington, Indiana, USA

## Curt Cignetti

### Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: Good win Saturday. First conference game, did a lot of good things in the game. Did a great job on third down offense level, 9 of 12, 5 of 5 touchdowns in the red area. I think for the year, we're 6-0 in the turnover ratio. Taken it away six times, have not turned the ball over.

Responded to their field goals or scores with scores, had a 90-yard drive, an 87-yard drive, two 75s. Defense held them to under 250 yards total offense, and 2 of 8 on third down. So there weren't any real splash plays on special teams in this game. So, you know good, solid performance.

All eyes on Charlotte. Team that's proven capable of playing up at a very competitive level. Last year, they played Maryland, led at halftime, one-score game in the fourth quarter. Florida was a ball game throughout the entire game. Carolina this year is a one-score game in the third quarter.

So they have a lot of transfers. They have a lot of athletes. Their defensive line is big, and they can move. They got a receiver that can really go. So, you know, there's a standard we do everything to, and we want to keep improving as a team. And we've got to have a great week of preparation. Starts with the staff. And stay humble and hungry as we prepare for this next opponent.

**Q. I know you talked about it some Saturday night. As you evaluate, after the fact, Kurtis's performance, 9 of 9 on third downs, his role in some of the long drives you talked about keeping things on schedule, making the right decisions, just what really stands out in maybe a film review of his performance from Saturday?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I thought he played really well and did a really nice job with his eyes and was accurate. We did a great job protecting. We had no sacks. And, you know, receivers did a nice job of separating and made some really good catches too. So I thought he played extremely well.

**Q. Curt, I know Charlotte has had some quarterback injuries and there may be some uncertainty with the position. How does it affect the way you prepare for them. Do you see major differences with their quarterbacks, whoever it may be?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, they've played three guys. Played two guys in the last game. Brought a guy in in the fourth quarter, an older guy. The backup was a younger guy. So we'll prepare for both schematically more so in terms of what they do, what they like to do.

They have a receiver that can really go, Number 3. And 18, the tight end, is a good player. So maybe the younger guy has a little bit of a liver arm and his mobility might be a little more, but the older guy has got the experience, kind of the moxie, understands how to play.

So it won't affect our game plan a whole lot.

**Q. At receiver with Elijah, what was it you saw about him that made you want to bring him to -- obviously to James Madison, and then how much has he improved since then? What attributes did he have that maybe others didn't?**

CURT CIGNETTI: We needed receivers that year in the portal. St. Francis University, it's an FCS school. He was all conference, had about 50 catches for about a thousand yards, give or take. He had a skill set. But like I said, he got injured in the spring, didn't do a whole lot. The first game, he was third team. Against Virginia, the second game, we won that game and made key applies and he was starting by the third or fourth game.

And he's just very competitive guy. Guy you can really trust and really good at contested catches. Smart. I mean, he loves ball. I think you see a trust factor really developing with Kurtis and him and Cross, who Kurtis has played with at Ohio U and the other guys that are in there.

**Q. Besides obviously what he can do physically, how important has it been to have Kurtis just be a guy who's a veteran guy, played a lot of football, and seen**



**a lot of things prior to coming here just to help him gain the trust of guys, learn your system, and go forward with it with some manner of consistency? How important has that been for this ball club?**

CURT CIGNETTI: To me, that's the key to the drill. We've had great success the last three years with the one-year transfers. We took Todd Centeio, who developed and was player of the year in the league on offense. And then we got Jordan McCloud. They were both older guys, had played, and Kurtis, obviously, had a track record before he came.

So it's not like you're teaching a young guy how to play the position. You got older guys that know how to play the position and now you're just fitting them into your offensive structure and then building upon the things that they do well. And so, you know, that position, there's just so many things that go on to have an older guy. You can't put a value on it.

**Q. To be able to go on the road in conference and get a big win like that, you mentioned a couple of the plays to be able to respond to what UCLA did in that second half as well. What do those types of things say about the maturity of this type of team?**

CURT CIGNETTI: We do have a lot of guys on this team that have played a lot of football across the board. We have a couple of new guys on the offensive line. At all positions, we have a veteran outfit. We're veteran at defensive line and linebacker. Ferrell is still kind of a younger guy, but we've got, other than that, we've got experience on defense as well.

So, you know, I thought we responded really well. We started very fast. Now, obviously, they fumbled the first play after we had a 7-0 lead. We're up 14-0 before you blink an eye.

In the second half, we had some adversity, obviously, with the penalties on defense. There was no panic, frustration. Maybe there was frustration in terms of what was going down, but our guys kept their poise and responded. And so, you know, I thought that was great.

**Q. You mentioned Amare. It feels like you guys have him kind of playing a lot of roles as far as heavy nickel. He's had early success as kind of that late rush roll as well. I think I've seen him at safety at times as well.**

How important, how valuable is it to have a nickel who can play as many roles as he can? What is it within his skill set that allows him?

CURT CIGNETTI: Right. That's an important position to rover, we call that, because you've got to be good against the run and the pass. And then, you know, against 12 personnel, we have a package. We put an extra linebacker in and we put him at strong safety for Sanguinetti.

And I thought he had a good game Saturday. You see him building weekly on his successes and playing with more confidence. I just wish when he intercepts the pass, he wouldn't run toward the end zone and -- you know, celebrate with your teammates on the sideline, right? Championship programs don't do that.

**Q. Curt, zero sacks allowed, as you mentioned. A lot of credit goes to the offensive line. But, also, the running backs' blocking was definitely a key part. Has that always been a staple in Shanahan's offense, and how important is that for those pass protection plays?**

CURT CIGNETTI: It's critical if you're going to drop back and throw the ball. That's six-man protection, primarily. The running back's got to be a good receiver out of the backfield. He's also got to be able to block the blitz.

I thought our guys did a great job Saturday. We were late on one or two, but all in all, you know, it was really good. And can't throw the ball if your backs can't protect.

**Q. I want to ask about Aiden and Jailin. They obviously play a lot of snaps for you. They don't rotate a ton. I know Aiden has the head set in. How important is their relationship, their chemistry, the football they've already played together in this defense, even before coming to Indiana, having two linebackers that can communicate, that recognize things, and maybe understand that relationship.**

CURT CIGNETTI: It's kind of like playing with a veteran quarterback on offense. Both those guys know the defense. There's new things that go in every week. The defense morphs year in, year out. But they have a lot of snaps in the defense so they understand it, and, you know, Aiden wears the GREEN DOT on defense. And they're used to playing with each other.

But regardless whether they're used to playing with each other or not, they have specific jobs to do every single play, depending on formation and what happens after the ball's snapped. But there is definitely a familiarity with each other, yeah.

**Q. Ignoring the calls from Saturday, I was wondering if you wouldn't like to see the targeting rules kind of adjusted a little bit to create levels of punishment**

**when it comes to those kind of plays balancing safety and fairness, I guess.**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I think there needs to be a balance there and common sense and intent, also. Probably the most hardest hits in the game was when Aiden Fisher intercepted the pass and got hit in the head, and there's no call for that one. You know, the other ones were kind of Mickey Mouse. So but, you know, that's the way it went down Saturday, and we're not going to change the way we play.

I don't think there was anything dirty out there, that's for sure.

**Q. Mikail had like seven pressures or some wild number like that. You mentioned, I think it was late August, that you've seen him evolve so much from 2020. Where have you seen him evolve, I guess?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I noticed that in spring ball. I think the biggest thing with him is he's been healthy. Because early in his career, he had a couple injuries. He started as a true freshman with two bad shoulders that were both surgically repaired so he missed the next season.

And now that he's been on the field, he's gotten better every year. I saw him turn it up another level in spring ball, which is what -- that's sort of the natural progression you want to see in all the guys is that they build off the previous year. So he's a good athlete. He's smart. He's crafty. And he plays really hard.

Thanks.