

# Indiana University Football

## Media Conference

Monday, September 23, 2024

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

## Curt Cignetti

### Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: Okay. Excited to play another Big Ten game. First one at home against a really good Maryland team. Very talented, well coached. A lot of good players, a lot of good athletes. Offensively, quarterback's playing very well, completing 75 percent of his passes. Dynamic receiving corps.

No. 10, Felton. Prather. Number 5, the tight end, really good players. Good running backs, offensive line. A little bit young but talented, big. Defensive line is loaded. Play a lot of guys. Be a big challenge. Linebacker. Secondary is a mix of youth and experience. So they got a lot of talent. They're a good football team. They're very well coached. Will be a tremendous challenge.

**Q. Hey, Coach, want to ask you about Mario Landino. He got playing time early on, maybe because necessity because of the depth there. What did you see about him at JMU? What did you like about him as a player since he's been here?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, he had nice frame, good athleticism, can run good twitch. Good motor. Very coachable. Learns quickly. Kind of a tenacious type of guy. Really enjoys the process. He's got a nice future.

**Q. Curt, Maryland's quarterback, Billy Edwards, Junior, has been in the program for a while. He's finally getting a chance to play on film, and what's helped him make him as efficient as he's been this year.**

CURT CIGNETTI: I've known Billy Edwards for a while. My first year at JMU, he was the guy we had targeted. I sat with his dad in my office a couple times. Started out at Wake Forest, then transferred to Maryland. You know, he can make all the throws. He's got a lot of snaps under his belt. They'll also run him, and obviously he's a threat when he gets out of the pocket as well when he drops back and escapes the pocket. So he's a very competitive guy with good arm strength, and good leader. And they like him, and I can see why.

**Q. Do you know Mike Locksley at all? Do you guys face each other as assistants back when he was at -- when you were at NC State? Curious if you guys have known each other.**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, we know each other a little bit. We haven't really spent a lot of time together. Back at State, he was at Maryland and at Florida, worked with Doc Holliday, a guy I'd worked with a long time at Florida. Of course, he was at Alabama after I was there so, you know, he's had a tremendous career. He's done a great job at Maryland.

**Q. You guys, I think, are -- I want to say second in the country in red zone attempts and red zone scores, or red zone touchdowns, rather. I think both. Just from your perspective, what have been the keys to being as efficient as you guys have been when you've gotten into those scoring situations?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I mean, we've run the ball well down there and thrown it well. Quarterbacks played real good in the pass game. We've had some open guys. He's found them. We've separated. And we have been down there a lot, like you said.

But, you know, I don't think we've probably played the most difficult schedule up to this point. Not trying to shortchange anybody we've played. The tests are going to become tougher week in, week out. Hopefully, we'll have the same number of opportunities and success in the future. But, you know, touchdowns are critical down there.

**Q. Curt, you were saying Saturday after game that you've been pleased with the progress Kurtis has made since you started playing games. I guess now, especially after being able to watch the tape from Saturday, are you able to expand on that a little bit? Just what have you seen him specifically be able to improve on since the season started?**

CURT CIGNETTI: He's in command. He's playing a lot of confidence. He's seeing the field. He's making the throws. When the pattern breaks down, he's running for yards, touchdowns, first downs. The guys have a lot of

confidence in him. You can really see it all coming together. And I thought, as the game went on, he really was sharp.

We scored 35 straight points. We took him out with time left in the third quarter. We probably could have kept rolling. But, you know, he's playing very well right now.

**Q. Curt, when you face an offense that has this much firepower, do you find that maybe you spent a little more time with the defense in terms of, you know, preparations than maybe you normally would?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I always watch all three phases. I watched all the Maryland's games, obviously put a lot of time in the off-season into Maryland. Once the week starts, I'm at the point now where I kind of let Bryant go a little bit. I don't look over his shoulder. There was a time I used to watch defensive practice, maybe make a few notes and call the staff in. Have not done that this year.

Him and I did meet Sunday after the game, you know, about a few things defensively. But I have total confidence in him and the defensive staff that they're going to put a great plan together, which gives us the best chance of being successful.

**Q. On the same topic with defense, how important is the defensive line's performance with the talent that Maryland has on the outside?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I think no matter who you play, it all starts up front and being able to stop the run and pressure the quarterback. If you can put pressure on the quarterback, that's less time that you have to cover in the defensive backfield and at linebacker.

So I don't think we played our best game this past week. I just didn't think the energy level was there. We weren't swarming the football like we've done in the past. I mean, I didn't see us really swarm the football until that fourth and one stop in the second half. So we're capable of playing better, and we're going to need to play better.

**Q. Coach, I wanted to ask about wide receiver Donaven McCulley. Is he back to 100 percent, and what do you need to see from him to be able to earn more consistent snaps?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, he missed time. When you miss significant time in the season, sometimes it can be hard to catch up. But he's getting closer, tried to get him the ball a few times in the fourth quarter. Came close. Didn't quite work out. So looking forward to him getting back in the swing of things.

**Q. Curt, you talked about the receiving corps at Maryland. But what does Maryland bring challenge-wise that maybe you haven't seen yet on both sides of the ball that you guys will have to face this week?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I mean, this is going to be the stoutest defensive line we've gone against. They're really big inside, and they've got good players on the outside too. And, you know, if you go two tight ends, they'll bring five defensive linemen in.

They're very aggressive. It's also going to be the best receiving corps we've seen up to this point. Probably the best quarterback we've seen up to this point. So it's the best football team we've seen up to this point.

You guys remember the game last year. It wasn't much of a game. So I'm sure they're going to come in here pretty confident, and they've got a lot of the same guys. So looking forward to playing.

**Q. What are some ways you've seen the offensive line kind of progress from the start of the season. And then kind of with that, I know Tyler Stephens has kind of been in some heavier packages the last few weeks. What do you kind of envision for his role?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think we've done a lot better job protecting the quarterback since the opening game, which has been a key to the passing game. I think those guys are really playing well. They're tough, hard-nosed guys.

Tyler Stephens, we had to bump him out to get some tight end reps because of Bomba's injury. So we'll see how it shakes out this week, and we've got to keep progressing and getting better.

**Q. I want to say you all as a staff have started 4-0 the last four or so years. When you're there in the process of trying to maintain the energy, maintain that momentum, what have you maybe learned about the keys within that?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, we are used to being successful, this staff that I brought in, the players that are here. When you win, it's about maintaining your edge and avoiding complacency and not having the warm fuzzies and not taking the rat poison, right? Eliminating the noise and the clutter, focusing on what's going to help you get to the point where you can perform to the best of your ability on Saturday, the preparation part, the physical and mental preparation.

So we have a mature team. I'm confident that those guys will be on point this week in practice and that we'll have a good week.

**Q. You mentioned the rat poison, but how much is the balance? Because you also mentioned confidence. Kurtis is playing with confidence, it seems like. Both sides of the ball are playing with confidence. How important is that element in keeping and sustaining momentum, and you want to kind of build on that?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Success leads to confidence, which leads to success. And so they go hand in hand. But you still have to put the work in during the week because everything we do isn't fun.

You've got to pay the price in terms of your commitment level, make some choices and decisions, good ones, and sacrifices. But we should be a confident football team right now, but we've got to put the work in.

**Q. Defensively, you've talked about avoiding the warm and fuzzies and being able to just change the way this team plays since you got here. What is going to be the key to just maintaining that level week after week after week and making sure that some of the guys maybe that have been here before that were part of that Maryland game that wasn't that competitive last year, doesn't -- they don't backslide?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think it's everybody. You get better, you get worse. We don't want to maintain the level. We want to improve the level in everything we're doing. We want to improve because we're not -- nobody is in a position in college football where they afford to go backwards. So you've got to keep striving. This is a really good football team coming in here. We're going to have to play our best game. But I'll be shocked if our guys don't understand that.

**Q. Curt, you were already without McCormick, and then you had Quintero limp off during the game Saturday. Are there updates on either of them? How do you feel like Quinn Warren handled the kickoff duties?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I thought he did a really good job. He's done a nice job in practice. He's taken advantage of his opportunity. Those other guys are sort of day to day, week to week, and we'll see what happens this week.

Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

