

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Coach Curt Cignetti Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: Good win Saturday. Hard-fought game against a good football team. I was really proud of the way we overcame sort of the adversities of the game, so to speak. Offense turned it over three times in the first half and defense responded every time. And then the offense throughout the game responded to Maryland's scores. Would like to finish the game a hair better. I thought we really could have made a statement at the end, but it's a good win.

Northwestern, they're a tough challenge. This will be the best defensive team we've played. Really extremely well-coached, in the right places. They know what they're doing. They make you earn your points. They're not going to lose the game. You'll have to win it.

Offensively, struggling a little bit to get their rhythm going. Quarterback position's been a little inconsistent for them but have some dynamic guys.

Kickoff return guy, a 96-yarder against Washington, plays some running back, too. Looking forward to having a good week in preparation for this next game.

Q. You talked Saturday and then again today about overcoming adversity. In your experience, how does that manifest itself when a team maybe does have to grapple with some of the difficult moments for the first time and see it through, defense pulls the offense up and offense pulls the defense up when it comes out the other side, how do you see it?

CURT CIGNETTI: To me, part of coaching, you're sending those messages in spring football practice, fall training camp, how are we going to respond when this happens, that happens. It's the way we play the game: Never too high, never too low.

You're not emotional about the circumstances of the football game. You're focused on the here and now and what's your job, keeping your poise and composure. When you get 11 guys doing their job consistently, that can happen.

Q. Going into the season, you kind of talked about some of the things you thought would be strengths, wide receiver, running back, defensive line. Anything you've seen in the first five weeks that maybe has surprised you in terms of a position or even a player, just, is that something you didn't anticipate before the season?

CURT CIGNETTI: I mean, I don't really look at it like that. To me, all the areas have to improve because you do get better or you get worse.

I think we've played fairly consistently for the most part in all three phases, but definite improvements that can be made.

With every success comes belief, and this is a team that's a little bit on a mission, and Northwestern is the next one up.

Q. In talking to the players over the course of the season, you know it's pretty clear that they embody the message that you want them to embody in terms of buy-in, in terms of what your vision of the program is. When you're recruiting players, and once you have them, too, how do you kind of build that -- how do you see that kind of vision of buy-in? How do you try to recruit it? How do you try to build it once --

CURT CIGNETTI: It's all about the people you hire and recruit. In recruiting, talent's important but character is equally important.

I sit down with all of them in my office because you want people that can kind of buy into the team concept, understand commitment and discipline, hard work, that are moldable and not necessarily totally self-centered type people. It's all about people.

Q. The way the defensive line was able to get some pressure and I guess also the offensive line in the run game in protection, was that sort of reassuring for you to see from both lines against a Big Ten opponent compared to the three non-conference games?

CURT CIGNETTI: I thought our defensive line needed to have a big win in this game because it's one of our strengths going up against one of their weaknesses. I felt like they did. We put really good pressure on the quarterback, and I was glad to see that.

The offensive line, I think, has done a nice job game in game out. I think certainly you could see in the second half the push we were getting in the run game.

Q. After Curtis' early interceptions on Saturday, you said he responded exactly the way you thought he would. What did you see in the Ohio tape that made you understand and realize he would respond that way?

CURT CIGNETTI: I think it's just more being around him since he's been with us since the spring. He doesn't really seem to get fazed by a whole lot of stuff and he's on to the next play.

Those turnovers were avoidable. Sometimes you've got to cut your losses, but I never had -- nor did anybody on the staff -- have any kind of doubt that he wouldn't bounce right back, which he did.

Q. Omar Cooper has made a few big plays, obviously on Saturday. Obviously the wide receiver room is pretty crowded. What allows him to stand out so much in that room?

CURT CIGNETTI: You know, his big thing is day in, day out consistency, because he has talent. I really like him a lot.

He's an explosive player with good ball skills that has just improved from spring to fall camp throughout the season and that's why we're putting him in position to make the plays. He made a couple big ones on Saturday, couple nice throws, contested catches. I liked him a lot.

Q. Your resumé is what it is as far as winning. Is there a shared trait you kind of look back on and say, like, all the teams we've had that are good have this trait?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well. Yeah. You've got a blueprint and a plan and you're creating a culture, an identity and a team mindset. We want to be a tough, physical, relentless competitor that plays really hard one play at a time, smart, disciplined and poised. Never too high, never too low.

That's how all the teams have played. That's how we're trying to get this team to play.

Q. Your offensive and defensive line on both sides of the ball have done a really good job controlling that line of scrimmage. It's been a big part of your success. How do you get them to continue to keep that up and build on that as the weeks move on?

CURT CIGNETTI: I mean, it's all to me the same. Today's got to be a great day of preparation, mental and physical preparation for the opponent coming up.

You stack good days and hope you can keep your people healthy because that's a big part of it too. We're deeper in some areas than others. Keep improving.

Q. You've mentioned the margin of error once the season starts. What part of this team have you seen from fall camp that's taken the biggest strides in shortening that margin?

CURT CIGNETTI: I think just in our mindset and how we approach the game and some of the questions were directed to overcoming adversity or the highs and lows of the game is that this team has sort of absorbed that message, tried to apply it where they're not overly affected by success or failure.

Q. With Myles Price, how did he get on your radar initially? What have you thought of his season for special teams and receiver?

CURT CIGNETTI: He's a really good player. He's a great teammate, too, has a lot of positive energy. Derek Owings knew him from his time at Texas Tech. Derek had been at Texas Tech.

We liked what we saw on his tape and in our conversations with him. I think he's done a tremendous job.

Q. When you got the job, did you seek out close connections for transfers or did those guys offer them or say this is a guy that maybe stands out?

CURT CIGNETTI: The guys are in the portal, you evaluate the tape. I think Derek came to me said this is a guy we ought to look at real hard; he's a great teammate, great for the locker room, which he is, yeah.

Q. We talked about the offensive line a number of times. I was just wondering, specifically Coach Bostad's approach, what do you like about his approach developing that group and how have they kind of owned his teaching the last few weeks?

CURT CIGNETTI: You know, Bob's a really good football coach. He's a fundamentalist. He's tough. He's

hard-nosed. His guys embody that. Kind of a blue-collar work ethic. He makes them tough and physical, and he coaches them that way every single day. And I see it show up on Saturday.

Q. On Saturday, you guys had three turnovers in the first half, which was unc customary for this team, but the defense responded time after time. What does that do for this defense going forward and what does that show you going forward for them?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, yeah, I was really pleased to see that, right? It gave us an opportunity to be successful. I'm not surprised by it because I think we have a good defense, a very capable defense.

I wish we didn't turn the ball over like we did, but sometimes you're going to have things throughout the season, and it was great to see them do that. Again, I just think every win builds team confidence.

Q. With Elijah, obviously you had him last year. I think he had 7-for-128 last week. What makes him who he is in your opinion?

CURT CIGNETTI: He loves ball. He's very competitive. He's got good talent. He's got great ball skills. He's really good at contested catches. He's always up. He's got a great personality, and he's eager to practice, eager to play and loves ball.

Q. Were you aware of the nickname he has?

CURT CIGNETTI: I heard that he had created that name. I can't attest to the validity of Waffle House Always Being Open. But even when he's not, he'll find a way to come down with the ball.

Q. Are you surprised at all by what this team has done? What should be your team's reaction to their success so far? What should be the fan and student reaction to what you guys have accomplished so far?

CURT CIGNETTI: I'm not surprised. I pretty much told everybody when I got hired that this is what was possible, and I felt strongly about that after we brought the 2022 transfers in December and added a few more at the end of spring ball and saw the culture come together the way it did.

But we had to put it on the field. So I knew it was possible because I'd kind of been a part of something like this before.

I think people are getting excited, which is a natural part of

that process, too, when you win, right, the stadium fills up more, it gets louder, and the team understands how fragile success can be and how important preparation is on a daily basis and I'm confident we'll handle today and this week the way we need to.

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