

# Indiana University Football

## Media Conference

Monday, October 14, 2024

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

## Curt Cignetti

### Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: Looking forward to getting back on the field, the practice field tonight. Obviously had the week off, got recharged, and looking forward to playing on Saturday against a tough opponent. Coach Rhule has done a great job with the football team there, 5-1, impressive team on tape. Giving up 11 points a game on defense, a veteran outfit, and offensively big offensive line, big tight ends, play a lot of guys, really skilled receivers, a lot of good running backs and a mega talented young quarterback.

As always, it's more about us and what we do, controlling what we can control. Having a great day today of preparation and stacking good days.

It's an important game because it's the next game. That's why it's an important game. It's this game. We're looking forward to it.

Questions?

**Q. They have, I think, one of the most disruptive defenses you've seen to this point, certainly one of the more disruptive, leading the conference in sacks, tackles for loss. When you look at that side of the ball, what are they doing that is creating problems?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, they've got good players. They're very well-coached. They play really hard. They're very multiple in their scheme. They've got guys that can affect the passer, a couple big guys inside, 315-plus type guys. They play a lot of people. They do everything they can to keep you off balance.

They also deflect a lot of passes. They've had seven interceptions, giving up about 85 yards rushing a game, I think.

**Q. You have a core group of JMU transfers, obviously, that dealt with success last year, 10-0 start and kind of the national spotlight at times. Has that helped having that kind of group that's been through this before, and did you learn anything from that experience, kind of navigating that?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, those guys and a lot of the other new guys we brought in and the guys that decided to remain, the right kind of guys, kind of the mindset and culture that we've been able to create here, those guys certainly have facilitated the change early on. Dealing with success is a lot better than dealing with failure. But you've got to stay humble and hungry and maintain your edge.

Yeah, I think you're always learning. Did I learn? Yeah. And it's like Mike Krzyzewski said when he retired; his toughest opponent was human nature. Human nature, because it's natural to feel good, this and that, things are great. But that's not what this game is all about when it comes to preparation and stepping between the white lines.

You've got to have some special characteristics to be able to deal with success and not be affected by it in a negative manner.

**Q. Yards after catch have been a big part of your passing attack this year. Can you speak to the importance of that, and also, when you diagram a play, can you try to design that into a play, or is that something that just happens with the receiver making a play?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, well, that whole crew -- and we spread the ball around. I think we had over 10 guys touch the ball last week or in the last game. They have great ball skills, and they're strong guys, too, which leads to broken tackles.

That's something that you're just trying to design plays that have answers and can free guys up versus all the different coverages you're going to see potentially, and then it comes down to execution. It's protection, separation, putting the ball where it's got to be, throwing it where it needs to be thrown and letting the athletic ability and the desire -- sometimes there's a little want-to factor there, too, involved in that, take over from there.

**Q. You mentioned Raiola's talent. What have you seen from him on tape and what challenges could he**



## pose to your defense?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, he's a really talented guy who's got great arm talent. He plays with a lot of confidence. He's got a really nice supporting cast. They protect him well up front. They've got one receiver who's 6'4", 225 and can really go, deep-ball type guy, and schematically the staff does a really nice job of -- they don't put too much pressure on him. They're balanced. They want to run the football, good play action pass, get him out of pocket, change the launch point.

I think they've done a tremendous job with him.

## Q. How is Jailin Walker doing after leaving the Northwestern game, and that position as a whole, how do you feel about the depth you have there?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, J-Walk is a guy you never count out, and I expect him to be full speed on Saturday. We're developing some depth there with Isaiah Jones and the freshman, Hardy.

But there are positions we don't have a lot of depth. But feel good about that group.

## Q. We know you're a process-oriented guy. What does that process look like during a bye week? Do you take time to step back or is it still balls to the wall?

CURT CIGNETTI: It's balls to the wall all the time because you're getting better or getting worse, never staying the same. We practiced three times, and we did some prep on this upcoming opponent.

Then you're looking at other people across the country seeing who's doing what well and trying maybe to get a few ideas that may help you down the road. Using that time wisely.

## Q. Kind of a big-picture question, but when you're rebuilding a culture the way you have here, what are two or three of the key non-negotiables that you have when it comes to rebuilding something like this?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, the first thing you've got to do as a leader, you've got to change the way people think inside and outside the program, and then you've got to have a blueprint and a plan. You've got to have high standards for everything you do, high standards, expectations, and accountability and consistency, day in, day out. How you do something is how you do everything. You have to be fully committed to being the best you can be. Be a great team guy. Those are non-negotiable. Be early, do your best, improve as much as you can every single day.

## Q. I know every game is important, especially from here on out. The crowds have continually grown. A sellout announced a week and a half before the game. What do you need from this Indiana crowd this week, especially in games like this?

CURT CIGNETTI: I think it's more about us performing as well as we're capable of performing, and give the crowd a reason to really get into the game, which I'm highly confident we will. We have up to this point every time we've gone out, and a lot of confidence in this group. It's an experienced group, high-character guys. We feed off each other.

## Q. Coach, the quality you're getting in special teams, kicking, punting, how much of an edge does that give you?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, your special teams is a third of the game, coaches like to say. But it's roughly 20 percent of the plays in any football game. But huge momentum swings when you make something really good happen or if something bad happens in a game. It's highly critical. Grant Cain does a tremendous job with our teams. Our entire staff is involved with special teams. We watch special teams together as a full staff. We make a big emphasis on it.

## Q. You've talked a lot about just making sure guys keep their heads on straight and stay level-headed. How do you make sure that that continues throughout the week with all the stuff that's going on, the attention that's coming to the program, but then FOX coming here and doing that kind of stuff? How do you make sure everybody keeps their eyes where they need to be?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, you've got to eliminate the noise and clutter and focus in on what's going to help you prepare so you can be your best on Saturday. We have enough maturity and leadership and experience on this football team, I'm confident that we can handle that. But that's my job, too, to make sure if I see an area that's maybe not quite where it needs to be, to push the right buttons and get it where it needs to be.

## Q. Is that just something that you (indiscernible)?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I send a message to the assistant coaches, they send to the players, I'll send it to the team. But we also don't want to create a self-fulfilling prophecy, either. I'm highly confident our team will prepare the way it needs to prepare for this upcoming game.

**Q. Something when you first got here, you said that you're too young to stop learning. Midway through your first year, what would you say is the most valuable piece of information that you've learned up to this point?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think what I've learned up to this point is that we have unlimited potential as an institution and football program, that if you commit daily and do the things you need to do to be successful, there's no imposed limitations on what you can achieve.

**Q. Coach, you've had success after bye weeks at James Madison and prior destinations. What goes into that? Do you feed off what you did the year before, or is there anything different you're doing this year?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I just think we have a way we do things and we have a way we do things during bye weeks, and then we have a way that we do things the week after a bye week. It really doesn't change very much. It's not quite as intense during the bye week, but we still have a structured routine.

When you've got good players, you have a better chance of being successful.

**Q. At the first game they handed out shirts with your name on them, and since then there's been all kinds of other designs that have been going around. What's your reaction to your popularity here around Bloomington, especially with the student body?**

CURT CIGNETTI: You know, I made a couple comments when I first got hired, I was out there on a limb a little bit, felt like that's what I needed to do. I think it's more of a reflection on how the team has played and the success that they've had on the field that's gotten people excited, and this is just a byproduct of that.

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