

# Indiana University Football Media Conference

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## Curt Cignetti

### Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: All right. Optimistic on Kurtis Rourke, he's thrown the last few days, building up. Workload will increase as the week goes on. That's all I'm going to say about it.

Michigan State, good football team. Very talented offensively in the skilled areas. Got a very athletic quarterback. Run it, throw it. Really nice receiving crew. The freshman has made a lot of big plays. Tight ends, backs are good. Like what they do on offense. They run the ball at you outside zone, can go downhill, good play-action game, out-of-pocket, some gizmos.

Defensively very aggressive, giving up 21 a game. Physical team. Good punter, good kicker. Played a tough schedule. Been in a lot of close games. It will be a big challenge.

**Q. I know he didn't play a ton last year, their quarterback when you have a first-year coach, but brings a quarterback with him, can you see a difference in a quarterback like that maybe in the familiarity with the scheme or anything you can watch on film?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, yeah, he played every third series last season, I believe. Watched a lot of their tape in the off-season. Talented guy. Now he's the starter, so he's playing more.

He's young. Still young. Very talented. Made a lot of good plays.

**Q. College football has seen veteran guys entering the portal, leaving the team at mid-season to extend their eligibility. You've had a couple. You also have guys like Kaelon Black a couple weeks ago was putting his individual goals aside, pushed to play more on special teams. How important is it having and finding guys with that kind of attitude? Has it become harder given the era of the portal?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Kaelon is a selfless guy. That's just

who he is. There's no one on the team that works harder than Kaelon. He's a great leader, highly respected. He's had some key runs. He's a big part of what we do.

The one thing about that running back rotation, you never know who's going to get the hot hand or get the carries. Ideal world... Everybody earns their role, but roles change week to week, can change, do change based on how you play Saturday, how you practice. When everybody accepts their role, you got a great thing.

Now, like you said, in today's day and age, across the country you're seeing guys after the fourth game, maybe they're playing special teams, not starting, they go back in the portal. That's been going on across the country. We've had a few, too. It's disappointing to see, but it is what it is.

He's a special guy. I'm glad we got him.

**Q. Throughout the Big Ten season each team you've played from the conference has had something different to offer as a challenge. What does Michigan State bring in?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I got a lot of respect for Coach Smith. He's a great football coach. Did a tremendous job at Oregon State when they were in the Pac-12. That's not an easy job.

He plays hard-nosed football. He's going to run the outside zone a couple different ways. Duo, inside zone. They're going to smack you in the mouth. Have a good play-action game. Also have enough little trickery there to keep you off balance so you're not overcommitting. Very aggressive on defense.

I think they're going to line up. They got a couple good backs. They're going to run that ball and push it down the field in play-action. They go out of pocket with the quarterback. You got to keep him in the pocket when he drops back 'cause he can run around and make plays.

We're going on the road, playing in front of 70,000 people. I've never played there myself. From what I understand,



they're right up on you. Those present new challenges.

We'll be ready if we prepare correctly.

**Q. You guys have only fumbled twice all year, and that was in one game. You've had seven games where you did not fumble the ball. Also on Saturday only had one penalty for five yards. Every coach emphasizes avoidance of turnovers and penalties. How do you maintain that edge through practice?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I mean, you get what you demand. We run a pretty structured, organized, disciplined program. We've got a lot of character on this football team. We've had some success, so they're listening pretty good.

We've always been really good in the turnover ratio. I think we're plus-eight right now. The last four or five years have been really low on penalties. Those are going down, as well.

Again, there are things we emphasize. It's all part of being successful on the football field. The guys buy into it. They have to buy into it. We spend a lot of time talking about it, working on it. It's as fundamental as lining up right, protecting the football.

Want to be fast, physical, relentless but smart, disciplined and poised, too. Always eliminating the pre-snap penalties, being smart with your hands. Good hand placement on offense when you're blocking. Blocking in front in the return game. Special teams. Pulling off the quarterback when it's time to pull off.

Everybody game's a little different. But we did a good job Saturday.

**Q. When you were first recruiting Zach to JMU, were you more attracted to his blocking ability or receiving ability? How much has he developed along the way?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I saw on high school tape that he did both equally well. Played defense also. Showed tenacity, functional strength, explosion. Also the flexibility, ball skills, movement skills you're looking for in a receiver. Thought he really had a good chance.

He wasn't really highly recruited. I was surprised. He was a little under-recruited. As soon as he got on campus, we knew we had a good player.

**Q. After going back and watching the tape, what stood out to you about Tayven Jackson's performance on Saturday, good and bad?**

CURT CIGNETTI: There was good and bad. He's got to build on the good and eliminate the bad.

He'll have a good film session with Coach Sunseri this evening. Like everybody else, better, worse, never stay the same. Need to be better tonight in the walk-through.

**Q. What did you enjoy most about the offensive line and their performance, especially in the second half, when Washington knew you guys were going to be running the ball, but still picked up the yards?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, we kind of hit the ground there in the second half. Had some key third-down conversions running the football. Ellison did a great job running. The line did a nice job. Tight ends, receivers with their down-field blocking.

We pulled a ball or two at quarterback. That was good to see. Probably broke some tendencies on third down. Maybe got one or two looks on third down where they were expecting us to pass, and we ran the ball. The backs really broke tackles and fell forward.

But the line did a good job throughout the entire game. First series we had one or two missed assignments. After that, played very consistently like they have all year.

It's a group effort. It's not just the line. It's the backs, the tight ends, the receivers, and the quarterback gets involved when he pulls the ball.

It brought back some memories to some of my earlier days as a head coach. I had one team, I think we had a 1400-yard rusher, a 1300-yard rusher, an 800-yard rusher and 600-yard rusher. There were times we (indiscernible) win games and throw the ball eight to 10 times. That was a long time ago. We don't do that anymore (smiling).

**Q. You talked about the importance of that long third-quarter drive after Washington got the pick and the score. Drives like that have happened a lot in conference play. What does that say about the fact that a punch is thrown and you're able to respond?**

CURT CIGNETTI: When you look all year long, the offense has done a good job of responding when the defense gives up a score. That was a critical drive. I think we had three drives in this game together there were over 21 minutes. Averaged over seven minutes a drive. You're also keeping the ball out of their hands, keeping the defense off the field.

I wasn't very pleased that we had to settle for a field goal at the end of the half. We should have scored at least twice

down there, but didn't for various reasons.

The offense has been pretty consistent all year long. They have been good on third down, been good on touchdowns in the red area. Been good on fourth down, responding to scores.

This past Saturday was probably our most inconsistent performance. I know all eyes are always on the quarterback. Everybody sees when he throws a completion or incompletion. We had some inconsistency throughout all 11 guys that were playing.

**Q. On watching film, you mentioned you're watching 80 hours a week of that, how do you spread that out throughout a week? What you're watching or trying to watch for, does that change as you try to implement?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, well, Sunday you come in, you review your game. I come in early. Like this morning I was in 4:30. Sunday I watch offense, defense, kicking before the coaches come in. Quick staff. I'll watch the offense with the offense. I may cut out a few plays and watch them with the defense, but sometimes I don't. We watch special teams together. We're on to the opponent.

We normally start with explosive plays, runs plus 12, passes plus 15. We'll watch three, four, five games together as a staff, then break up on our own. I'll spend an hour or two on various things tape-wise.

This morning I came in, there were some things I wanted to rewatch of their defense, then watch their last two games on offense. I've seen 'em on offense a little bit through some of our exchanges.

Today is a normal down distance day. Walk-through tonight. Offensively we went back through a few things, then started on the formations.

Tomorrow is normal down distance, too. Two days of that.

Wednesday is third down. I'll preview that beforehand.

Thursday is red area, two-point play, two-minute goal line.

That's kind of how it's done.

**Q. Your team still hasn't allowed a point in the first quarter, still outscoring teams a lot in the fourth quarter. What do you attribute that to?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, well, I think we're executing well to start the game. We got a lot of experienced, confident players. They're making plays early, so...

In the fourth quarter, we've been strong. Probably credit to a lot of things. Our strength and conditioning program has to play a role in that, I think. I think a lot of times we just built that momentum because we've been scoring and kind of distancing ourselves from whoever it is we're playing and sort of have the momentum at that point.

Every game's different. Looked like we had the potential to fall behind in the first quarter this past week. D'Angelo Ponds comes up with the big interception, run back for a touchdown. That day's coming. Doesn't last forever. Hopefully it's not coming, but...

I think a lot of things go into play there.

Thank you.

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