

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Coach Curt Cignetti

Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: Good road win up at Michigan State. I like the way we responded when we were down 10-0 in the first quarter. Guys kept their poise, kept playing, no frustration and picked up a couple of turnovers there defensively in the second quarter, which were key.

Scored 47 straight points, and really dominated the line of scrimmage up front on defense, seven sacks, 15 tackles for loss. Made some big plays in the punt return game. Blocked the punt. Forced a muff which also led to a touchdown. Had a couple of big returns and also got a deflection at the end of the game on a punt.

Offensively, made timely plays. Six of seven touchdowns in the red area. No sacks. And I thought Curtis really played well, and it was good to get a lot of guys involved.

So all eyes on Michigan. Really tough opponent. Obviously won the national championship last season. Wasn't much of a game between the two teams last year. And a lot of good players, really stout defense, really good special teams.

They run the ball well. Good tight end, running backs. Offensive line functions well. Settled in on a quarterback. He can spin it. And the receivers are more than capable. So we'll have to have a great week of preparation and play our best to have a shot.

Q. I know you largely kind of ignore the outside chatter and noise about the team. But are you interested to see what the college football rankings coming out for the first time this week, how the committee perceives this team? Because regardless of how the last three games go, win/lose, their view of what Indiana has done matters. Are you interested to see what their thoughts are on kind of how you perform?

CURT CIGNETTI: I'll see the rankings, but the only thing that really matters is you get the result when you play, and to do that you've got to keep the main thing the main thing and eliminate the noise and the clutter and stay focused on

what's going to help you play your best on Saturday to give you the best chance to get the result.

So today we've got to have a great meeting, a great walk-through and stack days, moments, hours, to put ourselves in a position to do that and not get sidetracked by all the other stuff.

Every week presents its own new set of circumstances and so there's a lot of that going on this week. I'm aware of it. But to get kind of caught up on that and lose your focus would be the kiss of death.

Q. How do you parse Michigan? Obviously they've been able to run the ball effectively in some games. You talked about them settling on a quarterback. They've never really found maybe the passing rhythm they had a year ago, but they're good on both lines of scrimmage. How do you, I guess, sort of I don't know, how do you explain or how do you at least evaluate a team that's had the sort of season offensively they've had with the struggles they've had?

CURT CIGNETTI: I look at them and I see a really good defense, really good special teams. And offensively, they haven't scored points. They're not in the 40s and 50s. But they can run the ball from 11, 12 and 13 personnel.

They've got weapons. They've got good backs. They've got good players, and they're a good football team coming in here with a lot of tradition, a lot of history, a lot of pride, and it's part of the reason it's on national TV at 3:30.

To meet that challenge, we've got to have a great week of preparation.

Q. Colston Loveland, one of the better tight ends not just in the conference but in the country, when have you a tight end who can produce like he does, what does it change defensively, if anything, in terms of how you handle a team that tries to attack through that position?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, you've got to be aware of him, for sure, down the field and on screens, various things,



because when you've got size and speed like that, you can create personnel mismatch. So he's an excellent football player. They've got a lot of really good football players.

Q. I know Michigan's defensive coordinator Martindale likes to blitz a lot. Has your offensive line seen a challenge like that in terms of the looks they'll throw at you? And I guess what's your confidence level that they can handle a challenge like that?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, you know, we're still fairly early in our preparation, but, you know, at this point in the season you've seen most of what you're going to see. They do present a lot of looks, and they do a great job. He does a great job. He's an excellent coordinator. He coordinated in the NFL a long time. And when you put the tape on, you see a defense that's very multiple and tries to create problems for offenses and good players that fly around, play hard. It all starts up front with them. They're good inside and good on the edge. And they're an aggressive defense.

We'll have a good plan to be balanced on offense and protect the quarterback and free guys up in the pass game and hopefully good in critical situations, and then we've got to go out and execute it.

Q. I feel like, when I look out, I see you on one end. I'll see the play on the complete other end. Why do you kind of stand as far away as you do? How do you maybe choose when to insert where you stand, I guess, around the team?

CURT CIGNETTI: I like to stay on top of what's going on in the game, see what's going on front in coverage defensively and also game situations, always be thinking a play or two ahead. If it's third down, our defense is on the field, on the phone with Grant, "Grant, what are you thinking, are we going to return this or go for the block?" I think we ought to go for the return here, those kind of things.

I'm on with the offense. Then I flip over with the defense, just to hear what's going on. So I'm trying to manage the game, be on top of the game, and stay out of the way, too, so to speak. But I've learned through the years game management is a critical component of being successful, whether to go for it on fourth, two-minute situations, when to call the timeouts. Two minutes before the half whether to push it down the field or not.

To do the best job I can, that's where I feel like I'm the best, is a little bit removed, let the coaches coach. Every once in a while, if I've got something to say, I brought the offense up when we were down 10-0 and said, look, a lot

of game left here, one play at a time, okay, nobody has to do anything special. And that's the way I operate.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about the production you're getting from Trey Wedig and Tyrique Tucker?

CURT CIGNETTI: Trey Wedig, older guy, played a lot of football in his career, from Wisconsin. Coach Bostad coached him at Wisconsin, knew him. He's been really solid for us at right tackle.

That whole group has been really solid, and he gives you a great day of work every day at practice and on Saturday in the games. He doesn't talk a lot, but really in that group aside from Katic and Carter Smith, the other ones are pretty quiet. Playing good football for us.

Tyrique Tucker also is in that rotation. We rotate four guys inside. He made some really good plays developing as a football player. He's gotten better every year. I'm really proud of him. I've seen where he's come from, where he's at today.

He was instrumental in Ponds' pick-6 two weeks ago when he deflected the pass or hit the quarterback's arm as he was throwing it.

So that's a position inside where we are able to rotate guys, keep him fresh, and he's played really well.

Q. The first three Big Ten games you guys were minus two in the turnover margin, now in the most recent three Big Ten games you're minus seven. In your eyes what's the biggest reason for that uptick in turnover creation?

CURT CIGNETTI: We're normally pretty high in that turnover ratio. We started out the season fairly well. Then we had a little spell there where we got a little bit behind. But they were critical in this pass game between the takeaways on defense and the blocked punts, which I consider a turnover and the muffed punts led to at least 16 points and in the Nebraska game it was 28 points.

We're doing a good job of protecting the ball on offense, which is where it all starts. Quarterbacks making good decisions in the pass game and the ball carriers, receivers are tucking it away nicely, and on defense we're swarming the football.

And our pass coverage has been tight. The first interception Aiden Fisher was really good in underneath coverage, deflected the pass and Ferrell made the interception, and on the second interception Ferrell made a really nice break on the ball and a nice catch for the

interception.

When you fly around, good things happen on defense. And we're flying around and a lot of good things are happening. TFL, sacks, and takeaways.

Q. Something I've noticed in the conference games is how your team's wearing down teams for the full 60 minutes. I guess what does that say to the resiliency both of the physical and the mental side that your players treat every play like either it's tied or trailing?

CURT CIGNETTI: That's what we preach. Never being satisfied. They've responded. They've been able to kind of compartmentalize and have an edge, good competitive edge going into the game; and regardless of what the score is, you know, the standard is the standard. We're doing a pretty good job of that first play to last play.

Q. I know that we could talk about any individual unit in a positive manner, but this defensive front, linebackers, what they did this past weekend, it's not historic, but pretty doggone close ended up with negative 36 yards rushing after giving up plus 22 at the front, the importance of what they've done all year long.

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, defensively that's where it always begins is up front. Being able to win the line of scrimmage both sides of the ball you've got to win the line of scrimmage.

Our defense has always been about creating havoc and disruption up front, TFLs and sacks. That hasn't changed. We play a little more zone coverage now than we used to play. And the linebackers, we put a lot on those guys, and they're run-and-hit guys, and involved in the blitzes quite a bit as well. We brought a lot of five-man pressure in this last game.

So you win championships by having a great defense. And we certainly have played good defense here the last few weeks and all season long been pretty consistent.

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