

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Curt Cignetti

Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: Okay. Busy day today. Obviously the big news, we find out who our opponent will be for the first round of the college football playoffs and still juggling portal evaluation with official visits coming in this week and game prep and practice. So quite a busy month.

Notre Dame, I'll be honest, saw them on tape against Purdue, and we're getting ready for Purdue, obviously a very good football team. They've won ten in a row. Coach Freeman has done a tremendous job with that football team.

I've looked at their stats, haven't had a chance to watch them today with all the media stuff going on, but I saw enough of them against Purdue to know that they're an excellent football team, and when you look at their scores, they haven't played in very many close games. So I'm sure they'll be quite the challenge, but we're looking forward to it. We're a good football team.

I'm confident in our football team. I think that we'll apply the lessons learned at a high stake when we had to go on the road in a hostile environment against a good football team and apply those up at Notre Dame. We're going to have a great week of prep.

Q. I guess you answered it there a little bit, but just how much did you allow yourself, if at all really, to look ahead to the idea of teams you might face, things you might be prepared for, maybe even talking with your team about things like the Ohio State atmosphere and learning from that because you knew you might have to go on the road to a similar sort of road environment. Just without knowing where you were going, how far ahead do you let yourself look?

CURT CIGNETTI: I think we addressed the high stake issues with the team Monday after the game. Then in terms of -- you know, last week we did a Monday routine, which is kind of a walk-through, 20-minute walk-through on offense, 5-minute on punt, about 10 minutes of individual, stretch, strides, six 60s. That's our Monday routine. We review the Purdue game and we preview the next

opponent.

We didn't know who the next opponent would be. We previewed Georgia for 15 minutes and worked against them in a 20-minute walk-through, just some base first and 10, P10 defenses, or plays that they run, top three runs, top three passes.

The next day, which was a Tuesday practice, off-week Tuesday, about an hour and 10 minute practice, we worked the highest state, corrections, base looks, same thing.

Wednesday, which is similar practice to Tuesday, we did work Notre Dame P10, first and 10. Tuesday is punt, punt return. Wednesday is kickoff, kickoff return, PAT, field goal.

So those practices occurred on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, but they were Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday type practices. So that's where we're at.

Q. You mostly stayed away from commenting on the playoff rankings, except kind of over the last 24 hours you made a couple of media appearances, weighed in a little bit. Were you frustrated kind of just having to defend Indiana's resume at 11-1 and kind of seeing you guys take some shots nationally from coaches, people, that were kind of analyzing the situation?

CURT CIGNETTI: That's all in the past. Our eyes are forward right now on what we've got to get done in terms of preparation for the next opponent and also handling the other things that coaches have to handle nowadays in December.

This team's accomplished a lot. I'm proud of what they've accomplished. I think the coaches have done a great job, players have done a great job. But in saying that, no one's satisfied. No one's satisfied. The players are hungry for more, the coaches are hungry for more.

Q. Coach today on the CFP show, Coach Saban asked Dan Lanning about making sure the players don't get the rat poison. You guys have been really good about



that this year with three weeks off. I guess how were you about that and what do you do to try to keep the main thing the main thing?

CURT CIGNETTI: I'm not really concerned about rat poison right now. Keeping the main thing the main thing is the main thing. I think we did a pretty good job of that last week, and we've got to do it again this week. Next week got to have a good week of preparation, stack days to put ourselves in the best position.

I think Dan Lanning's situation might be a little different because they're coming off a championship game victory and then they've got a bye week. So our situations are a little different. I have a tremendous amount of respect for the job he did at Oregon, another Coach Saban disciple, to some degree.

So I'm confident that we'll do the things we have to do to put ourselves in the best position to play on Friday night.

Q. When you played at Columbus, crowd noise was an issue for your team. How do you learn the lessons from that, having played at Ohio State, and what really different can you do to deal with crowd noise?

CURT CIGNETTI: I do think, having been in that environment and coming out individually and collectively, you benefit from the notes taken. I think where it affected us most was offensively, having to go to a silent cadence the third play of the game.

Didn't affect us the first series of the game, but once Ohio State had a chance to get their guys on the sideline, this is what they're doing, they started to tee off on us pretty good. There are some things we can do and incorporate, which we've already begun to do.

Then we did some uncharacteristic things in that game. We dropped a punt snap. We had poor location on a punt that resulted in a punt return for a touchdown. Still got to get the guy on the field. We had some communication errors on pass protection, and a couple critical missed assignments.

I think we're going to be a lot better the next time we're in that environment.

Q. I know you said you'd only been able to watch so much of Notre Dame so far, but what you've been able to see of them, what stood out? And with an extra week to prepare for this game, what's your process like for getting ready for this game?

CURT CIGNETTI: What stood out in the little bit I've seen

is a really good football team that's very disciplined and very well coached and executes at a high level.

In terms of our preparation, normally this would be like sort of like when you have an off week and the coaches dig deep, and we install some with the players, and then the next week we're more aggressive in our install.

We're doing a balancing act between recruiting and preparation. So we're going to have to make the most of every day, but we are going to turn sort of the portal, recruiting, official visit piece off Saturday around noon so that Sunday, which is really like a Monday now, it's all football, it's all prep for the coaches.

Q. You've mentioned kind of your last and prior playoff experience as a head coach. What kind of things do you think when the specific things that will be applicable to preparing for this game?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I am kind of used to this routine, but I don't think it's a major change for any of the coaches, to be quite honest with you, that are in the playoff. You just have a few more days between games. So I don't think it's anything that anybody can't figure out.

Q. The quality of kicking you've gotten with Nicolas, can you talk about that and the impact he potentially could have?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, he's 100 percent on his PAT field goals -- or on PATs. He missed one field goal, where our timing was off just a little bit. He's been very consistent kicker, which is great to have obviously. So I feel really good about him.

Q. I want to get your thoughts, Bryant Haines obviously up for semifinalist for the Broyles Award. The defense ranks, I don't know what it is, top five, top three in a number of categories. Your thoughts on the job he's done. And then on your defense overall, just how consistently they've played.

CURT CIGNETTI: Bryant's done a tremendous job as a coordinator and has every year since he's been a coordinator. I think this is his third full year now as coordinator, I believe. If I'm not mistaken, we're No. 1 against the rush and No. 2 in least amount of yards given up per game.

We play with that edge -- fast, physical, tough, run to the ball, swarm the ball, pressure the quarterback. Just like every defense I've had since really I went to JMU in '19, and that's when that philosophy of being disruptive up front was put in place and a premium put on those front guys



and linebackers.

Things have been tweaked through the years. We play more zone now than we used to play, but our guys really play in, play out. It's not always perfect. It's not always perfect. But we play with a nasty edge. We get a lot of hats to the ball.

We're going to have to be able to stop the run this week in the next game. Notre Dame's got an excellent running game, and the quarterback alone has rushed for about 750 yards. So you add that to it, and it will be quite the challenge.

Q. I think its nine of your assistants have multi-year deals?

CURT CIGNETTI: Right, Yeah.

Q. Your thoughts on just getting that done and that kind of stability and that kind of commitment?

CURT CIGNETTI: I think, first of all, the president, Pam Whitten, and Scott Dolson, their commitment to being successful, providing the resources and funding to be successful at the P4 level in the Big Ten Conference, I can't say enough about how appreciative I am. I think it's a statement, major statement.

In a sport where you really need to be successful at this level, for a lot of different reasons. Once they came to me and we redid my contract -- and I love it here, like it here a lot, love Bloomington. Then the next order of business was locking in the staff because, when you win like we do, guys have opportunities. That took about 10 to 14 days. Because all these guys have agents anymore, but I was really happy that we were able to get done what we got done.

Tino Sunseri is going to take the coordinator job at UCLA but coach through the playoffs. Happy for Tino because he's done a great job as the quarterback coach. I've known Tino a long time and known his family for a long time, and I'll miss him being around.

The philosophy has always been, when you lose a coach, hire a better one. We had a lot of players here at quarterback before we hired Tino. While he's done a great job, we won't miss a step, and he'll do a great job preparing the quarterbacks during the playoffs.

Q. You and your staff have plenty of experience in playoff games this time of year, whether it's the playoffs or bowl season, but it's an unusual time for teams because there's so much space and time

between games. How do you balance that and use that to your advantage and keep the team where they need to be?

CURT CIGNETTI: We played Purdue on, what, the 30th? The players had Sunday and Monday off, and Tuesday they lifted weights. Wednesday we were into a Monday routine and got three days of practice in.

This will be like an off week practice schedule except we'll be a little more aggressive with install. We've got to really make the time count because we've got to balance the recruiting and the preparation part. Then next week will be like game week.

It's all about really getting enough practice in to maintain your timing and your fundamentals. Last week that's what it was about, and I thought we did a good job of that and get the players refreshed.

Now this week we'll be a little bit -- well, we'll be a lot more specific to who we're going to play, and then we'll ramp that up another level next week.

Q. Notre Dame's historically been seen as kind of the premier program in the state. How much just beyond wanting to advance no matter who you play do you see this game as an opportunity to show how Indiana can match or even surpass in terms of the statewide programs?

CURT CIGNETTI: I think it's a great game for the state in general, for Indiana and Notre Dame to be playing in the College Football Playoff. I think the series began in 1898, and Notre Dame has pretty much had the upper hand. I don't know the series records.

But regardless of who we play, this is the playoffs. You win or go home, and we're in it to win it. I mean, our odds of probably making the College Football Playoff at the beginning of the season, I don't know what they were, but they were pretty darn low, I'm sure. We were picked 17th out of 18 teams in the Big Ten.

Our odds of winning the next four games are probably significantly higher than they were of making the college football playoffs in the first place. So we've climbed that mountain.

Regardless of who we were going to play in the first round, the objective is the same.

Q. Curt, I only ask this because you do have so much experience in the playoffs. Do you feel compelled at any point to write a practice plan, a travel plan,



day-by-day, until January 20th?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, until January 20th is in my head, not on paper, but like we have our plan. We had a plan for the month of December, which we revised slightly today because of playing Friday instead of Saturday. Then I have a plan on paper through the end of the month, January 1st, which you have to have.

Q. Now that you've had a week off to reflect on this incredible season, 11-1, and just getting to the College Football Playoff for the first time in program history, what does that mean to a program like Indiana to be on this national stage?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I haven't had a week off. It has been a week since we played. I think I've been busier this past week than I was in season.

I really still haven't had a chance to reflect and let it all sink in. I did walk outside my office this afternoon for about 30 seconds and looked around the stadium between interviews, and it kind of hit me, and it was like, wow, we've accomplished a lot in 12 months.

But that's all in the past. What are you going to do now, Lou Holtz? That's kind of where we're at. It means a lot to any team that's in the College Football Playoff.

I guess we're a newbie to this, so to measure the value of this for Indiana versus Notre Dame, I can't really answer that question, but I know winning opens a lot of doors and it has in the recruiting process, and it will here in the short term for sure.

Q. I think it's been about a month since Drew Evans was out for the season. How have you seen the offensive line adjust from that moment till now?

CURT CIGNETTI: I thought Drew was really doing a good job. I like him a lot as a player. He's a tough guy. But I think Tyler Stephens has really come in and done very well, very well. So we're marching on. He's playing winning football.

Q. When you came here, you said you wanted to change the culture, you wanted to change this from a losing program to becoming a winning one. Does punching a ticket to the College Football Playoff for the first time in school history do that for you?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, changing the culture is a process. You've got to change the way people think inside and outside the organization, throughout the state, and in Big Ten country, and the country. Then you've got to have a

blueprint and a plan and you work your plan every day to gain the edge. Then you've got to be committed to improvement.

You've got to have high standards, expectations, and you can never lower your standards. This is the end result of a process, and this is the reward for a job well done.

But it's like opening a gate into a different world, right? There's work to be done, and there's things out there, there's goals out there to be accomplished, but you only have that opportunity because you changed the culture, the product, the result, and the expectation level.

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