

# Indiana University Football

## Media Conference

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## Curt Cignetti

### Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: All right. Game week, game week, game prep. Take the preparation, attention to detail, sense of urgency at practice, energy to another level. We've got to get it back to game week.

We've had good practices, but we weren't getting ready to play. Everybody's got to ramp it up a notch, players and coaches.

With that, I'll open it up to questions.

**Q. I don't know how different it is schematically in terms of the way they run the quarterback, the way they fit the quarterback run element into their offense, but when you're dealing with a team that does want a little bit more of that option sort of look, how helpful is extra time to prep? I know coaches used to talk about with the triple option, I know that's a little bit extreme, but it always helped to have a few extra days. How helpful is that?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think at this point in the season you've seen about everything, and you put the best scheme together based on who you're playing and what they do. Notre Dame is an excellent football team. They're extremely well-coached.

In reference to your point, they run the quarterback quite a bit, and he's an excellent player. I've been watching him for a couple years, studying Duke offense, when he was at Duke. He's a competitor, and he throws the ball well. He's got good movement skills, good size.

When you play Notre Dame offensively, it starts with the run game, and the quarterback is a big part of the run game, not only on the designed quarterback runs but when he drops back and he's in the pocket and escapes the pocket and his ability to create plays with his arm and his legs.

**Q. How has your offense kind of developed a unique identity this year in terms of your ones at JMU? What's been different about this year's group?**

### Offensively what you've done differently or leaned on?

CURT CIGNETTI: Are you talking about schematically? I think every year you tweak, you add some new things. You've got to do that to stay ahead of the game. Whether you're looking for new pass concepts or RPOs or want to get better in the red area, which I think we've done this year, put a lot of time into that in the off-season because it's three field goals to overcome one touchdown. So touchdowns are important there.

Then you've always got to take into account your personnel and put them in the best positions to be successful and come up with the weekly plan to get that done.

I think there's always tweaks in certain areas or certain game situations.

### Q. (No microphone)?

CURT CIGNETTI: As you guys know, I'm a film junkie. In my free time, I'd just as soon be watching tape than be doing anything, other than sitting in my recliner.

That's a couple years of low red, high red work. Nowadays you can PFF every touchdown pass, from the 1 to the 4, from the 25 to the 5, and then you kind of go through those and seeing what might fit and pull up something, depending on who you're playing, that scheme-wise might match something.

You're always trying to gain the edge in this business because all these coaches can coach, all these teams are good despite the records, the margins for error is very slim every game, and you've got to always work toward finding the edge.

**Q. Last week when you talked to us, you said the first week was going to be about juggling, preparing for Notre Dame and the portal. Obviously you're just in game mode this week. How was that first week? How challenging was it? If you could change anything about how they've done this calendar, what would you change?**

CURT CIGNETTI: It was challenging. I did get home a lot later than I normally do, and I was still in early, 4:30, 5:00 a.m., because you're dealing with portal evaluations, official visits, and still opponent prep to some degree. Then you're dealing with your staff and your player retention as well.

I'm glad that week is behind us. The message this morning to the coaches was, okay, guys, no phones in the meeting rooms. If you've got your phone, take it to your office. Surprisingly, every guy got up except one. So that was revealing.

Off weeks are different than game weeks in terms of what's required in terms of your focus and attention to detail. In terms of the recruiting calendar, I don't know that there's any easy answers to that. When you look at it from a player's perspective, everybody starts school in January, so guys that are switching schools need to have the opportunity to visit prospective schools in December, but yet seasons end at the end of November, championship games the first week of December, and there's always going to be bowl games, and now there's the expanded playoff.

I don't really know the answer to that. I don't think it's a simple situation, and if it was, it would be remedied by now.

**Q. Anything unique about Notre Dame's defensive front compared to some of the better defensive fronts that you've seen, especially over the last month or so? Anything that stands out?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, they're good. Their defense is good, and Al Golden does a great job of coordinating their defense. They're a high pressure, blitz outfit, quite a bit of man coverage. Then they've got the zone mixers and fire zones to keep you off ballet little bit.

They get 11 guys doing their job pretty consistently. They play fast. They're physical. They're good tacklers, and they get a lot of hats to the ball. They adjust well during the course of the game. They haven't given up many points because they've got good coaches and they've got good players.

Up front, they're quick, a lot of movement. But when you take into account then the blitzes, there's a lot of moving pieces, and they play coverage extremely well. They do a great job in man coverage.

They're a really good defense, and that's why they've won a lot of games.

**Q. I know you brought in West and Kamara to make an**

**impact, and they certainly have. What has made them stand out?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Good prospects. Mikail is a real smart player. He's explosive, dynamic, quick. He's a good technician. C.J. West, for a big guy, moves extremely well, has really good get-off.

I think it all starts with Derek Owings and our strength and conditioning program. He does a great job of taking body fat off these guys and adding lean muscle mass. They'll gain weight, but it's good weight. And still making them more flexible and quicker, faster, explosive.

Then I've got to give our defensive coaches a lot credit. I think Coach Haines does a great job as a coordinator finding ways of creating disruptions up front and stop the run and pressure the quarterback. Coach Kuntz, Pat Kuntz, and Buddha Williams do a tremendous job as well. We have two defensive line coaches, Pat coaches the inside guys and Buddha has the outside guys.

It's a team effort, and these are guys that really want to be good. So they commit and they work hard every day to improve. You see the end result.

**Q. When you look at what Kurtis has done, I think he's the top rated guy of quarterbacks in the playoffs per Real Football Focus. He's No. 1, No. 2, No. 3 in the country in a whole bunch of categories. What's made him so good and so consistent throughout the whole year?**

CURT CIGNETTI: A lot of things go into that. First of all, he had a body of work before he came here, and he's played a lot of football. So you learn by doing. He's gotten a lot of reps at playing quarterback, a lot of successful reps.

Coming to a new school is an adjustment. Schematically, some of the concepts may be similar but the language is different and obviously a new way of doing things, new players, what have you, and a lot of new portal guys at receiver.

I think it all starts with protection. We've done a pretty good job of protecting him most of the time. We have certainly had our hiccups during a couple games, and we've got a group of receivers that have really good ball skills and can make contested catches, and our backs are good out of the backfield as well.

I think schematically a lot of our pass plays, they have answers versus man-zone, one high-two high. He's a quick thinker, and he processes quickly. He's extremely

accurate, and he's good in the pocket. He doesn't panic. He's a really good quarterback. He has certainly taken his game to another level, there's no doubt about that.

He was a Player of the Year in the MAC in '22 but suffered an injury at the end of the season. So he really couldn't benefit from the off-season strength and conditioning program going into his senior year. Still had a good year.

Since he's come here on a bigger stage, I think he's built on every success and developed more confidence and belief and continues to improve. I think you really saw that starting Game 2 and then out on the West Coast against UCLA. Then when you can involve 10, 12 different guys in terms of touches between running backs, tight ends, and receivers, that's a great thing to have multiple guys that can separate, get open, and make plays.

**Q. Obviously Notre Dame doesn't have a lot of firsts left in its program, but this is one for them on Friday. It's new for them. It's new for you guys. I wonder how your team will handle this type of stage where everyone in the country is going to be watching you guys?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think to me and our guys, in my mind, it's just another game. You prepare for this one like you prepare for all of them. I think for our players, they're going to be excited to play and excited to prove something.

I don't think anyone was happy with the way we came out of Ohio State. We didn't give ourselves a chance to be successful, giving up 14 points on the punt team and then having some of the communication breakdowns we had on pass pro. We didn't give ourselves a chance to play offense.

But I think our guys have learned from that too and we'll be better in a hostile environment than we were that particular day. At the end of the day, it's just football. The game is going to be won or lost between the white lines. I want them to go out there, fly around, have a little swag, and play the way we can play.

**Q. You talked about Notre Dame's defense and the respect you have for them. Obviously they have a really good secondary with some very good defenders back there. How important is it for Indiana to get their running game going to help open up their passing game?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think it's always important to be balanced. If you can run the ball successfully, then it opens things up in the pass game and vice versa. We have been pretty balanced this season. We've run the ball

well. Those guys have done a good job up front. Coach Bostad did a great job, Coach Miller, the running backs, everybody involved. That will be a big part of it again Friday night.

**Q. Who have you kind of seen in the locker room as a player take charge the last couple weeks as you guys prepare mentally and physically for this game?**

CURT CIGNETTI: The same guys that really have done it all year long. I've said this a few times, we have a lot of guys that could be the leader or one of the two or three leaders on this team. We've got a lot of older guys that played a lot of football that have high character, great competitive excellence. They're consistent day in, day out. They represent the principles and values of the program, and they're respected by their teammates.

There's probably at least a dozen guys I could name there. You've got to send three captains out for the coin toss, or maybe you're allowed four, and we send the same three out every game -- Carpenter, Katic, and Ellison.

We just have a bunch of guys that love to play football and work hard every day. We've had a great locker room from the get-go, and it's never changed.

**Q. I want to say it was James Carpenter who said last week it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. How do you go about trying to manage that and also with the idea that it is kind of just whatever's ahead of you?**

CURT CIGNETTI: It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for him because this is his senior year, and he hasn't had to do it yet. He's played in the FCS playoffs before.

But he also understands that the cap lies on the opportunity. He's got to stack meetings and days and put himself in the best position to be successful on Saturday. It's no different than if we were getting ready for Game 5. He's an older guy. He understands that.

I think they're all excited to be a part of it, but I think they also all understand what it's going to take to be successful and play their very best football.

**Q. I know Jamier Johnson missed the game against Purdue. Health-wise, how is he doing? How is everybody on the team doing? In general, how tricky does it get to manage that aspect, keeping everybody healthy when you get this late in the year?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, our health is good. Jamier is out there practicing, looks good. We're in pretty good shape.

**Q. You called yourself a film junkie, I guess. With the extended break you have between Purdue and Notre Dame, how much of Notre Dame did you go into? Is it deeper than normal? Did you key in on anything specific?**

CURT CIGNETTI: We've been watching Notre Dame from the get-go. I also like the sense of urgency during game week in terms of preparation where you're more detailed and focused and putting that plan together.

We put a few core things in that we've been practicing forever that fit the Notre Dame game, and we'll get a little bit more specific this week.

**Q. Aiden Fisher has been really consistent all year long. What does that mean to you, a guy that came from JMU and followed you along on this ride?**

CURT CIGNETTI: He gets better every year, and when he talks, people listen, but he backs it up with his play on the field. I'm glad to see the recognition that he's received postseason, as well as the other guys that have. And he's the quarterback of the defense.

**Q. When you look at this Notre Dame team, they're one of the best at turning teams over on defenses. How important do you feel like it will be for you guys to protect the ball and not put it into danger on Friday?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Critical. I think we're plus 15 on turnover ratio, and they're plus 16. They've forced 25 fumbles on the season. That's a high number. So ball security for us and them is going to be really important, winning the turnover battle.

I'll tell you, the other area that they're really dangerous is their punt return team, they've blocked three punts and forced a couple bad snaps because of the pressure they put consistently. So they've gotten points there.

Then when they punt, they faked three punts, which those kind of plays can be game changers in a game. So they use their punt and punt return as weapons. We've got to be right on point.

Our teams have been really consistent this year, other than the Ohio State game, and we're going to need a good special teams effort this week.

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