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Bryant Haines

Press Conference



Q. I know it's maybe not as extreme as dealing with a team that does the triple, but when people talk about preparing for a team that has a strong quarterback run component in their offense, extra time, more than just a week, is really helpful. When you have that extra time, what do you focus on, whether it's linebackers, ends, whoever is making those reads that are necessary? What are the keys that you drill with them in terms of both pre and post-snap, what they need to be ready for when you have an offense like Notre Dame's that's going to run the quarterback as often as they do.

BRYANT HAINES: Post-snaps nothing really changes too much. Our reads are our reads. Our keys are our keys. It all fits into that bucket. What I can call pre-snap can help with those pictures. Nothing can fully help plus one run game like a quarterback that's simply going to run the ball with a lead blocking running back. There's only so many things you can do to account for that. You got to use all 11. They use all 11 of theirs. We've got to use all 11 of ours.

I can work through that with what I call, but in terms of pre-snap, this and that, we have our reads, we have our fits, get off blocks, make plays, attack.

Q. In speaking to some of the guys up front this year and some of the guys that came over from JMU, they said you've thrown a lot more at them, doing a lot more movement. Is that because you're more comfortable and have more experience with them coaching multiple years with the guys at JMU? And why do you like them so much, those opportunities and twists up front and how they impact the offense or how you think they impact the offense?

BRYANT HAINES: To your first question, I think that's part of it. The reason I've added more is because I've been with those guys for a long time. They know what a loop game is. How many times are you going to call a loop, Coach? You got anything else? Part of that is them wanting to do some different things, so that's part of it.

Then too, I'm a big fan of angles. I want to create angles and picks and rolls, like I said, good way of getting home and freeing guys up. If I can find a new one that Coach Kuntz, Coach Buddha like, the defensive linemen like, we'll try it. That's the first part of the question.

Secondly, why do I like it? I like to dictate the terms of where the quarterback is going to go. I can call jet and I can come and use a lineman and they just rush and they just run up the field and they're hitting swims and they're falling down. But why? Because the quarterback can choose where he wants to go. He can step up into this gap, he can feel a vertical surge, he can step up into the pocket. I don't want that, I want to tell him where he wants to go. Right-hand quarterbacks, maybe they want to escape to their throwing hand. Whatever the situation, the game-plan is, I can use stunts to dictate the terms of the quarterback instead of vice versa.

Q. The impact that West and Kamara have delivered this year, obviously you brought them in to do so and they have. What makes them so special?

BRYANT HAINES: They're both really hard workers. They're both great individuals. They both want to be great. They hold themselves to a really high standard, so that's the first thing.

In terms of what they bring skill set-wise, two different types of guys, and C.J. is a big powerful guy. His role is so important because as the nose guard of our defense -- and any defense for the most part -- is at the center point of everything. He's taking on double-teams. He's got to win that one-on-one against center. It's important to win the middle of the defense, and C.J. does that for us.

Then similar but a little bit different, the field then is in a unique position too. It's like the funnel point to like are you going to spill the ball and the ball has to bubble over the top of you, or are you going to build the wall and build it back inside? Each call has its own purpose behind that. But Mikail kind of dictates the terms. Am I going to let this ball make it to the field? If so, how much can he make it bubble so the rest of the guys can kind of take great pursuit



angles?

They're very important roles, and those guys flourish in their roles.

Q. Aiden Fisher has talked often about the connection you guys have, how you're just really in sync. How important has he been for you coming here to Indiana, implementing this defense, being right in the middle, being the quarterback, the guy that's got the green dot or whatever it is, and just making everything work so well?

BRYANT HAINES: I get that one frequently. It's hard to put into words how important he's been. Yes, the green dot component and my trust in him, but also his ability to convey for other guys. I coach all the linebackers, but sometimes when Fish says, no, no, you're doing it wrong. It coming from your teammates is different than Coach Haines yelling at me every time I misfit this thing.

He's helped me develop that room. I'm proud of where that room is at, the linebacker room, we've got young guys that are there coming along. That wasn't just me. Aiden was part of that too. He's part of the culture change here. He's part of my voice, my mouth piece to the guys on the field. He's the green dot. He's the leader. He's the unquestioned leader.

He knows what I want, and he's able to get it done and gets his ten teammates to play the right call. Yeah, I can't say enough good things about him and what he means to this defense.

Q. Kind of flowing along the same lines, all the guys you brought from JMU, you have at least one at each level of the defense. What's that personal relationship like with those guys and how has that kind of passed along from them to their teammates to the field?

BRYANT HAINES: Yeah, I've known these guys for a long time. I was thinking about it the other day. I've known James Carpenter since 2019, and I was thinking, it's going to be weird being in a defense that doesn't have James Carpenter in it. Been together so long, so relationships are close, but that's the case with all the guys now. I'm close with all of the players in my own way. It's no different to a JMU guy to a guy that wasn't here before. I love all those guys. I'm hard on all those guys. I want the best for all those guys.

That's the case in terms. I love them. They've been great. They changed the culture. They're a huge part of what you're seeing now in terms of the change in IU football is those guys we brought from JMU, no question.

Q. Coach Cignetti was talking about this a little bit a couple weeks ago, the whole fast, physical, relentless, the concept of we attack, we don't sit back. When did you guys like decide, okay, this is how we want to play? Were you guys watching another game? Were you watching your own team? Kind of what was the genesis of when you decided this is who we're going to be defensively?

BRYANT HAINES: I guess I've just always, always felt like that's what I would want my defense to be, whether I was calling it. I've been with Coach Cignetti for a long time since I started as a defensive line coach. Defensive line coach, I'm not calling the defense, but what did I want my defensive line to be? I wanted them to be fast, violent physical, northbound, I wanted to play in their backfield. I just took that and become a linebacker field. I wanted that to be part of the linebackers fits too. I wanted to be downhill aggressive, slipping blocks, getting vertical playing in their own backyard.

Now that I'm a defensive coordinator, I'm doing all of it. I want the same thing. That's never changed on my end. I don't know where the phrase came from, I don't know where it generated, but just philosophically, that's who we both are. That's who we are from a personality standpoint. We want to attack.

Q. Bryant, I'm just wondering, you guys have defended the run so well all year, what type of challenge is this in particular with a team that has multiple backs and a quarterback who obviously can attack you, and all of them are averaging over five yards a carry? What's the key to stopping that type of attack?

BRYANT HAINES: It's a very good rushing attack. I think it's tenth in the country overall, 224 yards a game, 6.3 a clip. You can't stop the run if they're going to run the quarterback. I mean, you'd have to over commit so aggressively to stopping the run that you would put other parts of the defense in peril. It's not necessarily about stopping the run. It's making the quarterback pay a toll every time he decides he doesn't want to run it. If that's 20 times, then that's 20 hits for the good guys.

They're a very good rushing attack. I like our front seven. I think we're aggressive at all levels. We have different things we can do, whether it's blitzing, or mixing the looks up. He can run some, and he probably will, and he'll get a couple yards, but he'll also get a couple hits from the Hoosiers.

Q. When you're preparing for a Notre Dame team that



has a good tight end and utilizes their tight end well, how do you kind of look back at maybe a game like Michigan where they like to use their tight end? How do you kind of prepare for that scheme-wise?

BRYANT HAINES: They use their tight ends in a different capacity than Michigan and even Nebraska and those guys, but you definitely have to account for them.

Again, it's kind of like the same thing as the run fits, post-snap, the rules are the rules. We account for the tight end in all of our defenses, all of our coverages. Having awareness of where he's at, what his alignment might tell us, those are some of the pre-snap indicator that's can help guide us into a better, cleaner reaction time, getting the ball.

The coverage is what the coverage is. We're not going to overcompensate for the tight ends, but there's a healthy respect there for what they do with their tight ends.

Q. On Mikail, I want to say as someone who Cig mentioned in the fall, he realized this spring he had just reached a whole new level. I'm curious what it was or when realized he had ascended as he ultimately has?

BRYANT HAINES: First thing first, as far as Mikail, Mikail is the hardest worker on the defense. He's the harder worker on the defense, he's the last guy off the practice field, so he's always looking for his own improvement.

When did I start to notice, man, he's really flashing? He's always flashed ever since I've been with him. He seems a little twitchier off the edge. I think part of this is just a mental thing. I think him coming here from group of 5, coming from JMU, can I roll with the big guys, can I roll with the ten offensive linemen? Then recognizing in the spring, second, third practice in, oh, yeah, I can do the same thing that these guys that I was doing to Sunbelt offensive tackles. So it's probably a confidence thing that showed up too.

He's playing confidently. When you're playing confidently, you're going to play fast. You're going to play aggressive. That's what Mikail has done all year.

Q. James Carpenter was in here last week and called it a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be in a position like this. I know some of this kind of starts at the top, but for you as a coach, how do you kind of balance it's just another game to allowing them to appreciate the position they're in?

BRYANT HAINES: It's a delicate balance there. Of course

it's the biggest game for Carp. Carp played at Roanoke Catholic High School. It's an all-in-one. I don't know what the student body is. A small school guy, walked on, walked on to James Madison, and now look at him. He's playing in the college football playoffs starting at the defensive tackle. I'm happy for him. I'm happy for all these guys, and I'm excited for the moment too.

We're a process oriented operation. It's Monday. It's a rainy Monday. We've got a Tuesday practice. We've got to clean up normal downs, make sure the run fits are tight, got to figure out quarterback run still. So it's just another day.

When the game gets here, I'm sure the moment will be awesome and an electric environment, all those things. But at the end of the day, run, hit, tackle, swarm, the standard is the standard. Another football game.

Q. With James Carpenter, when did you realize that it was possible for him to kind of go from a guy you recruited as a walk-on to now how much he means for your defense? Kind of what's that journey been like to see him go from point A to point B?

BRYANT HAINES: When I recruited him as a walk-on, I just thought this guy could maybe be a pretty good football player at JMU. I didn't necessarily think this is going to be my starting three technique in the Big Ten.

But credit to him, he's another one of these guys that doesn't say a lot, but man, he never stops working. He wants to get better. He wants to get pushed. He wants to get coached. It's one of the reasons he came from JMU. He liked the scheme. He loves Coach Kuntz, they have a great relationship, and he just wants to constantly push himself.

I'm proud of him and how far along he's come. I could have never seen this five years ago in 2019 when I recruited him out of Roanoke Catholic High School. I'm proud of his journey. Same for a lot of these guys.

Q. Marcus Freeman said one of the things you guys, problems you present is all the different formations and fits you throw at him and changes they have to look at. What is it that they do so well offensively that you have to worry about that your unit has to focus on?

BRYANT HAINES: They're a really well-coached offense. They're very balanced. I mentioned like 224 yards running per game. I think it's right at 200 a passing game. It's a very balanced offense.

They're balanced even in their tendencies. Typically what I do when I game plan somebody is I want to figure out how can I attack? This formation is this, boom, I can bring that pressure, or this personnel grouping and that down and distance, I can hit them with this.

These guys are balanced. I think they do a healthy job of self-scouting. They have a counter-punch to anything they throw at you. Yeah, just a good clean offense.

Then guys, at the end of the day, if you're willing to run your quarterback down Main Street, that is unique. Some coaches don't want to do that. You could lose them. You could get hit. So that presents its issues.

Q. We didn't get a chance to talk to you kind of during the season, but were there any moments that this clicked into place for the group, that stood out? Whether it was a game or response to a game. Anything that kind of you thought that's a playoff worthy defense or playoff caliber defense for you guys during the season as things kind of developed?

BRYANT HAINES: I thought we took a big step coming off the first bye week. It was when we played Nebraska here at home. I thought the defense took a step there. We made a couple changes schematically. I changed a couple of things coverage-wise and shell rotation disguise, the staff and I did.

I thought we really did a good job of self-scouting and identifying a couple of flaws in our system and came up with a couple of new ideas that have really paid off. That's to me when I felt like, okay, we have the complete package now, was the Nebraska game.

Since then, it still hasn't been perfect, I don't know if it will ever be what I consider perfect, but it's what I would deem a legitimate defense.

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