

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Curt Cignetti

Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: Okay, day one is in the books, year two. Not a lot to report, really, other than it was cleaner than last year's day one, which you would expect because it was all new last year, and we've got a lot of improvement to make, but we don't need to be where we need to be right now. We need to be where we need to be when we run out of the tunnel for the opener.

Liked the organization and didn't see too many horrific plays out there with the ball on the ground or things like that, penalties. Of course we don't have officials at practice. That would probably help because there probably was some holding on both sides of the ball out there.

The drill is we've got to get better every day, develop consistency in performance day in, day out, play in, day out, practice to a high standard, and that's how you improve. We'll keep throwing more at them every single day.

The first day it's a certain part of the menu, and we've got 13 practices and 10 days of install, and we'll get most of it in, and then we'll probably slide a few tweaks in once we figure out who can do what.

We're going to get three in before spring break, come back, get about a four-day break, get rehydrated and do number four the following Thursday. That's where we're at.

Questions?

Q. You talked briefly about adding Chandler to the staff. He's the first new quarterbacks coach since 2021, since Tino. What's the process like building a rapport with him? How much work goes into teaching him what you want out of quarterbacks or a system?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, he's learning our system, what are our standards, our expectations. He's been in NFL football for the last four years in various roles. NFL is different than college, so it's a transition for him. This will be a good spring for him.

Q. I imagine as you map things out, there are some constants every year in the spring, but you talk about a lot of stuff not being new the way it was a year ago. What does that allow you to try and plan to get out of these next few weeks that maybe a year ago you said we've got to walk before we can run, now maybe you can start to jog, if that makes sense?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, it's spring football, so we want to develop players. We want to improve daily. We want to promote competition. We want to install our offense, defense, special teams, learn about our team, and everybody is going to come out of spring football undefeated.

The most important thing is you come out healthy with your top-line guys and that you develop players and that you improve and begin to form your identity and your mindset, and then you come out and evaluate if you have any needs in the spring portal, where you may dabble, and get ready for the fall.

I think you learn about your team every day, and this is a new team. I believe we have 81 guys on scholarship, maybe 82, and unless I'm miscounting, 33 of the 81 are new guys. That's almost 40 percent. I think 3 out of 8 is 47.5, right? So it's a little bit over 40.

So you start over. You truly do start over every year, but now with the rules the way they are, it's even more so.

Q. Like you said, first day, so still a long way to go, but just your initial impressions on Fernando Mendoza and how he took to things out there?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I thought he did good. The big thing we're going to be working on him this spring is getting the ball out of his hand on rhythm. A lot of the concepts he's been exposed to, they were probably called differently. Some of the concepts will be a little bit new.

Most of the guys the first two weeks, they're thinking and playing at the same time, and then the last two weeks they're playing more than they're thinking. I suspect it'll be the same way with him. We're very high on him.



There's things at Cal that -- he was under duress quite a bit at Cal, so we protected the passer and the pass better, so developing trust and confidence in the pocket, throwing the ball on rhythm, and eye control, those type of things. But we're out there today in our pajamas, and we will be the next practice, too. You don't play football that way.

Today it was almost like muscle memory drill. This is where you go period one, period two, that kind of thing. Once we get into the banging and clanging, things will pick up.

Q. Can you assess the linebacker situation? You've got Aiden back, but how you see that developing?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, well, Ro Hardy played a lot of football for us last season. We went to our trio package, which was a three-linebacker set against 12 personnel. Isaiah Jones the first half of the season was that first guy in. The last half of the season it was Ro Hardy. So you've got two guys, Hardy and Jones, that have played a lot of football. Then we've got some young ones behind them that we're going to see how they develop.

Q. Give an assessment of -- I know you're mixing in some transfers with some guys that you retained, but where do you see the running back situation developing over the course of the spring?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I'm not into making predictions on how it will develop, but I can assess what we have. Hemby has got a body of work as a starting football player in the Big Ten conference and has been a good player, both running the football and catching the football. Kaelon Black obviously is a veteran. Lee Beebe had a nice year last year at UAB. Martin, a freshman, I thought showed promise last year, and Vanhorne is back for his eighth year (laughing). He was actually the starting running back games 2 through about 6 or 7 my first year at JMU.

Anyway, so we've got some depth there, some nice body types, and I noticed him out there a few times today, and I thought they looked good.

Q. When you have somebody like Aiden Fisher who had the year he had, what are the next steps for somebody that talented, and what are the important things for him to do as a leader and as a player in spring football for himself and for the other guys?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I think those kind of guys, they've been leading all along. That part of it is a little bit of a continuum. Success is not a continuum, but leadership is. So he's been leading the team throughout last fall and the

off-season and the winter workouts, and I think this spring, number one, we want to get him off the field healthy. He's been nicked up a little bit in the fall, previous falls, and he wants to get his body in as good a shape as possible so he's ready to play football in the fall.

For him it's important to get some reps and stay sharp, but probably the priority at linebacker is to develop depth there and figure out who our other guys are and keep him healthy and ready to go in the fall.

Q. The process of trying to install when you have -- I forget was it how many -- almost 41 percent of a roster just changed, how is the process of trying to install and just add the flavor you want when you have a roster that changes so much as opposed to what it probably was about eight, ten years ago?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, the install, I think if you looked at it across the board, offense, defense, would be at least 80 percent of what it was last year, exact. Probably more. You've got to remember, our guys have been lifting weights. They've been running, conditioning. But you sprinkle in position meetings there, too, for the last month, month and a half. So these guys have had meetings with their position coaches.

So I thought it was pretty clean out there today in terms of guys lining up in the right spot, running the right route. It's not rocket science. Most of these concepts these guys have been exposed to in the past. They're just called something different.

So I thought it looked pretty clean.

Q. For the true freshmen, how much of a leg up does it give them to arrive early in the spring as opposed to the summer?

CURT CIGNETTI: I think the big advantage there is, number one, academically, they get to go through a semester without the pressure of being in season. Being in the strength and conditioning program in the winter is huge for them in terms of their development.

Spring ball for most of them will be kind of rough in terms of like if you had to give them a daily grade, which we don't need to do.

But once they go through the summer conditioning program and weight room again and then get to fall camp, they're a lot further ahead. So if a guy shows the ability and the potential to help your football team, he's much further ahead and better off having gone through spring football.



Q. With Fernando, it's not that often that you have a quarterback come in and have his younger brother be in that quarterback room with him. Is that something you've had before, and what is that dynamic like? Is that bringing extra juice and competitiveness out of them to have them there?

CURT CIGNETTI: No, I've never had that before, but I know the young one will push the old one as hard as he can, and he's got a good future. Two great kids

Q. I often hear you saying you're hunting for complacency within your program. Coming off a good season, first spring practice, what are the red flags or hallmarks of complacency that you'd be looking for?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, the strength and conditioning coach, Derek Owings, had very positive things to say on a daily basis about what was going on downstairs and in the running program. So looks like we passed that mark.

I thought today was a very solid day. I'll assess things as we go through the spring and see where we're at on a daily basis.

But look, this is a football team that didn't finish the season very well. Went up and played in the College Football Playoff and didn't play like we wanted to play. We have some things to prove.

But that's all in the past. These are a whole bunch of new guys, new team. Every team in America is pretty much that way, probably 90 percent of them. Everyone is 0-0 right now, and they will be heading into game 1 in the fall. It's all earned, not given, between the white lines.

Q. Coach, you said you learn something new about your team every day. What did you learn about them today?

CURT CIGNETTI: I thought it was a solid day. I thought they did a nice job of handling the workload, and it looked like football out there.

Q. I saw Justin Ellison out there. It looks like you might have a role for him as a staffer. How did that develop? The relationship you guys had, he spoke eloquently about being the first guy to jump at the chance to sign here. How has that developed, and what's made you want to have him on staff?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah. Well, I think I got a text from him a month, month and a half or so that he was going to be in town, would like to talk. He decided that he was done with

football, and he wanted to coach.

He was one of our leaders last year, and Scott created the opportunity within our organization for him to help us coach as a graduate assistant or a quality control coach. So he will help Coach Miller with the running backs, and he'll do a good job.

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