

# Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Bloomington, Indiana, USA

## Coach Curt Cignetti

### Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: So spring is in the books. Good night. Nobody got hurt. Some good, some bad, some ugly. I thought the players competed well. Sarratt and Fisher dinged up their knees last practice, but nothing that will -- it's not a long-term thing.

Like I told the players, when we come back in the fall, it's on, it's real, and we need our good players to play good every single day, every single rep, every single drill. Spring ball is over. We'll get out what we put in. We've got a chance to be as good as we want to be, and we've just got to keep improving. We've got to have a great summer, great fall camp, et cetera.

We've got a long way to go. We're not there yet. But you can see who -- we've got six or seven guys that have the potential to be good team leaders, got good players out there. We need depth in some areas. You'll probably ask me which ones. I'm not going to necessarily point those out. I'll let you figure it out on your own.

But it was good competition. Good spring.

**Q. Kaelon Black is a guy that's been with you for a while. Your thoughts on how he's done in spring and how he's kind of progressed since you first got him until now?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, high-energy guy. He's always started camp real well early in the year. Just staying healthy has kind of been his deal. He's got good speed. He's got a lot of juice. He's been with us a long time. He was a Virginia Tech commit out of high school and hurt an ankle, and I don't know what happened, but he ended up with us at JMU.

**Q. Can you compare where you are coming out of spring today versus a year ago? Anything that you feel better about than you did last year at this time or anything that stands out from this spring camp versus last year, what you went through?**

CURT CIGNETTI: That's a hard question. What I'll say

about this team is we have a lot of the pieces that we need. If those pieces play to their full potential, consistently, day in, day out, play in, day out. Spring sometimes you don't tackle until this day here, and you're managing guys, sort of making sure the key ones don't get dinged up or injured in spring ball. But in the fall you've got to cut them loose. There's some progressions probably where we might look a little stronger right now, but I don't think there's a particular area we're extremely deficient.

**Q. On Fernando, what are maybe two or three things you felt he really got the most out of or progressed the most areas during the spring here with you?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I thought he had a really good last week. Now, I'm not -- I haven't watched tonight's film, okay, so I'm going to take tonight out of the mix. But I thought his last three practices, one of which was a scrimmage, he made major strides. It really started to click. I felt really good before the scrimmage where we were there with him.

I think Alberto had a good spring, too.

**Q. Rolijah Hardy once again demonstrated his opportunism tonight. I'm sure he's going to get more of a chance to play this year than he did last year. How did you see him grow during the spring and what does he add to your defense?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, about halfway through the season he was the starter in our trio package, which is three-linebacker defense to 12 personnel, two-tight-end sets. Really he was a starter the last half of the season. He's been a starter all spring. Just like Fernando, his last week of spring was really, really good, and that's how we need him to play when he comes back in the fall. He's got a lot of talent.

**Q. I know in the past month you've kind of talked about how EJ has had trouble staying on the field for you for extended periods of time. How was he in that aspect this spring? How was he able to progress this spring, and where do you see him being able to come into -- what position do you see him coming into fall**



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## **camp for you guys?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, right now, we have three veteran receivers that have done it on Saturday at the P4 level: Surratt, Cooper and EJ. They all took turns playing in the slot when Makai Jackson tweaked his hamstring before practice 4 and never returned, and then when we lost our Michigan guy to the non-contact knee, Tyler Morris, and Becker made progress.

I also thought that the freshman, Bond, made progress, and we've got Chandler coming in. So I'm counting on Jackson coming back, which will help our depth, and EJ made plays all spring long, and with EJ, it's not having the mental lapse here and there, missed assignment here and there, that kind of thing.

But I'm counting on him having a huge year for us. He's a big target with great body control, excellent ball skills. He's a threat.

**Q. Coach, you mentioned LeBron Bond as one of the young guys who stood out. What other guys on defense and the secondary, I think Byron Baldwin made a nice play and a couple of the younger receivers, too. Which freshmen stood out to you tonight?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I think all the freshmen have a long way to go. We have a lot of them, and when you compare the freshmen -- when you've been used to like the COVID extra year guys, for instance, and you're in the portal and you're coaching 25-, 24-, 23-year-old kids, you forget what coaching 17-, 18-year-old kids is like, especially ones that come in and enroll in school in January in the NIL era.

We've got some talented guys that will be good players at this level, but we've got a lot of them that got to grow up. But I thought Bond gave us a really good effort, practice in, practice out, and certainly Byron Baldwin, he flies around, got a lot of talent, likes contact, good ball skills. There was others, too.

But freshmen generally speaking when they come in and go through spring ball, it's very developmental for them, and they're a lot better when they come back in August.

**Q. You talked about Rolijah Hardy. What have you seen from the linebackers as a whole this spring?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, we all know what Fish is and Hardy and Isaiah Jones is a veteran and a savvy guy, can play two positions, and after that we've got to develop some more depth.

**Q. Slot receiver spot, when you're moving guys outside to in, what are some of the challenges there?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Just learning their assignment, splits, little things like that. But really most guys should be able to play on the left side, right side and in the slot. Even the guys that have never lined up at what we call H in the slot have played in the slot because in season we'll move guys around. Who do we think runs this route the best or can get open deep on this route the best. It's not that complicated that they can't learn -- the only one that didn't work in the slot was Charlie Becker.

**Q. Especially for spring, the offense looked kind of pretty sharp. All three quarterbacks looked good and you have a number of guys that made pop plays with Kaelon Black getting a great run, Roman Hemby some great plays as well as BB and Omar Cooper. Do you feel like you've got more individual players that can make plays this year on their own?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, either we've got more playmakers on offense or we don't have very good tacklers on defense. It's one or the other.

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