

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Coach Curt Cignetti

Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: Okay. And generally pleased with the progress we made last week, take a few penalties out of there and there's always a few lighter things to clean up. Focused on prep for Illinois. Obviously a good football team. Ought to be a great environment Saturday night. Looking forward to it.

Q. (Indiscernible).

CURT CIGNETTI: (Indiscernible) sustained a noncontact knee injury and he'll be lost for the season.

Q. With Khobie Martin, obviously strong in that fourth quarter. Is he a guy that might be ready to step into a larger role to make it back into the three-back rotation?

CURT CIGNETTI: He's going to need to. I thought he ran well Saturday night. He's got talent and he'll get more reps and we're going to need him.

Q. The obvious question, but they've got Luke Altmyer, a very experienced quarterback. I'm sure you've seen a lot of him, whether scouting for this game or maybe watching him play other teams you've scouted, what are your impressions of what they do with him at that position and how they accentuate his strength?

CURT CIGNETTI: First off, bigger picture, they're a really good football team. They've got a lot of good players, a lot of veteran players. Coach Bielema does a great job, he and his staff in all three phases, offense, defense, special teams, veteran quarterback, have a lot of talent, very accurate, can extend plays. He's won a bunch of games for Illinois.

And that's the one thing about Illinois, is they know what it takes, the success they had last year, returning a good nucleus of guys and added some new ones. Very much kind of like us, good core return that understands what it takes. So ought to be a great match-up, but impressed with Altmyer.

Q. Last year, the schedule seemed to progress kind of perfectly as far as challenging. This year, you start right off with a top 10 match-up. Any difference in preparation or is it just a natural thing that goes --

CURT CIGNETTI: Look, last year, before the season started, we were playing favorite in three games. We were picked 17th out of 18 teams. So every Big Ten game that we went into, we were an underdog before the season started, maybe with the exception of Purdue. So last year's in the books. It's a new year. This is a good football team. We're a good football team.

Q. What have you seen so far from Illinois defensively on tape? What kind of challenges do they present for you guys?

CURT CIGNETTI: They morphed a little bit schematically starting with the bowl game last year against South Carolina in some of their coverage packages. And they carried that on into this season. Multiple personnel groupings, defensively 4-2-5, 5-1-5, 5-2-4, 4-1-6 and others. They did a nice job of disguising coverage, nice disguises. They play a lot of guys. A lot of good players running to the ball. They have a lot of hats to the football. Put pressure on the quarterback, tight coverage. Really tied together well. Good players.

Q. Their main punt returner/receiver, what makes him so hard to defend, offense, and what do you need to do in the punting opportunities?

CURT CIGNETTI: He's their leading receiver, spreads the ball around, good player, good ball skills, movement skills. As far as a punt returner, hang time always helps, get the coverage time to get down there and do a great job with our coverage and tackle in space.

Q. You said that you've had to coach this team harder than you have in years past. How much progress do you think they've made on that front?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I think the three games, that was the recipe. We had to bring this team along as far as we could. We were playing teams pretty heavily favored



against. (Indiscernible) turned out to be a pretty decent thing, didn't it? And so now we're ready for Big Ten football and I like the progress we've made. We have stacked days, meetings, practices and days in preparation to put ourselves in position for success Saturday night.

Q. Illinois hasn't had the turnover this year. What makes them so efficient offensively to be able to do that?

CURT CIGNETTI: They've done a nice job protecting the ball, turnovers, takeaways. The Duke game is a one-point game at half, and Duke turned it over five times and that was the name of the story right there. Four fumbles, so did a nice job stripping the ball. But we're 5-1 in the turnover ratio as well. BP had a fumble his first carry. Other than that, we've been pretty clean. We've been able to take the ball away ourselves.

So line of scrimmage, turnover ratio, battle of explosives, being good in critical situations, teams need a win, that's always the formula. Never really has changed. So I think when you look at the two teams statistically, you'll see a lot of dominant numbers for the offense, defense and special teams.

Q. Do you have any prior relationship with Brett Bielema, and what I guess about the way he coaches and what about his teams make them tough to play against?

CURT CIGNETTI: Never coached against him. Really never met him until I joined the conference. He was very welcoming. Always had a lot of respect for him as a coach. He was a head coach at a very young age and has really had some nice teams. And he's done a great job at Illinois and they're fundamental and you can see the coaching show up on tape.

Q. You get one extra day of preparation because of the Friday game last week. Is there anything different in the process, and really how important is it to have the extra day for your players' bodies to rest?

CURT CIGNETTI: We as a staff, I gave the staff Saturday off. So we resumed a normal Sunday routine. Players got an extra day off. It will benefit them also and we're into a normal Monday.

Q. You all have rushed for over 300 yards each week. What do you feel has kind of -- why, I guess, like, why have you all had so much success in that regard?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, we're doing a good job up front and the tight end and receivers are doing a nice job

blocking; backs are running hard. And Bob does a great job with the line. And we've been a little better than the people we've played, too.

Q. (Indiscernible)

CURT CIGNETTI: I'm always focused in on the game regardless. So for me it doesn't really change much. It's a nationally televised game, NBC. It's going to be a great environment and I know our players will be excited.

Q. (Indiscernible)

CURT CIGNETTI: Last year's history. I don't compare the last year. I'm totally focused on the here and now and this team. So I think we made good progress last week and now we've got to have a good week of prep so we can play our best Saturday night. And I don't look down the road at who we play, this and that, I just want to have a great Monday today.

Q. I know with the competition, did you see the improvements you wanted to in the secondary from the previous week, or is that to be determined?

CURT CIGNETTI: I thought we made improvements in all areas defensively. We got lined up, played with urgency, got more hats to the ball. Coverage was tighter. So it was good.

Q. How do you go into this week still working on things after the game you had?

CURT CIGNETTI: Every game is different. Everybody schematically is different, every opponent, and the personnel you're going to play against. He's made progress. Really pleased with the way he finished the game and the progress he had made since the opener. This is a new week. But I have total confidence he'll step up and respond.

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