

# Indiana University Football Media Conference

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## Curt Cignetti

### Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: UCLA, we're playing a 3-0 football team that's undefeated, 3-0 in conference. Since they have retooled their staff, now have their new defensive coordinator and offensive staff in place, very impressive football team, okay?

Offensively this team is rushing for 233 yards a game right now, in their last three games, which would be against Penn State, Michigan State and Maryland.

Time of possession, 36 and a half minutes. That means the other team has the ball 23 and a half minutes. 50% on third down, 70% on fourth down. They've gained two possessions with two faked punts. They're keeping the ball away from the other team.

They're starting fast. Outscoring people in the first half 58-17. Averaging 33 points a game.

Defense, a lot of different personnel packages. Really try to keep you off balance. Really impressed with what they do. When you get outside of normal down-and-distance situations, you see a lot of stuff.

They got about seven personnel packages, a variety of blitzes, pre-snap looks with linebackers mugged to try to confuse the quarterback a little bit. They're a rejuvenated football team.

Led by a talented quarterback, who really has a quick body and a live arm. Has made some big plays with his legs also. Really good skill people. A new offensive design, so to speak.

I mean, we're playing a 3-0 football team at home this Saturday at 12:00.

Michigan State, good conference win. Offense scored touchdowns their first five drives. The first two in the third quarter were great to see. They're all great to see.

Defense shut 'em out the last 38 minutes of the game till at the end we had quite a few of the starters out. They kicked

the field goal at the end.

We didn't get off to the greatest start. Michigan State had two possessions. We had one possession. There was nine minutes left in the second quarter. At that point every play was going to be really important. We did a great job of adjusting and playing a little better. Two-thirds of the game we pitched a shutout.

Special teams, we had 22-yard punt return. Made all our extra points, field goal. Both kickoff guys kicked the ball out of the end zone. We didn't punt. They punted twice, once with quarterback.

This is going to take tremendous preparation and effort on our part this Saturday.

Questions.

#### **Q. Do you have any updates on Kellan Wyatt?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Wyatt suffered a knee injury pass-rushing. Was engaged with the offensive tackle. Got his leg extended. Came down a little funny. Right now it looks like a long-term injury. I'm not sure if we'll see him the rest of the season or not.

#### **Q. In terms of injuries in general with your team, there are teams mostly with 20, 15 names on there. You guys avoided that. Is there a season where you did have a lot of injuries that changed, reevaluate things? When did this start in anything specifically you credit Derek Owens with his training?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I think Derek is key on the soft tissue stuff 'cause even way back, JMU, for instance, we had our share of hams. We hired Derek. That first year we had a couple. We discussed it. He did a lot of research on it, too. We've had very few soft tissue things.

A lot of the knees that occur nowadays can be non-contact. Not much you can do about it. It's outside of your control.

But I've always been a relatively short practice guy. My practices probably have gotten shorter, even shorter



through the years. We do everything we can to prepare the team fully, but keep 'em fresh and healthy.

**Q. Nico, different play-caller, structurally trying to do some different things. Have you seen them use him in different ways, that dual-threat ability he's shown?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I mean, truthfully everything we're watching right now, their offenses the last three games, I haven't watched any of their offense prior to that, except for maybe what I saw on TV.

The defense is really four games old. But at that point the offense had not changed. So we're focusing in on the last three games with the people that are pushing the buttons and calling the shots right now.

Nico can really spin the ball. He can make all the throws. He's got a really quick release. He's got a live body, a really quick body. That's why you've seen some of the long gains out of the pocket with him.

**Q. You mentioned defense got off to a little bit of a slow start. After watching film, anything you have pinpointed?**

CURT CIGNETTI: From my perspective, we had a great second half against Oregon. The whole theme was our response, doing what you got to do.

I just don't know that we really answered the bell right away. The first two plays, we had 'em bottled up. They had a third and 13. We had a guy kind of make a poor decision, bid on a six-yard route. If we could have gotten off the field there.

Then we had a missed assignment on their touchdown pass into the bench. We had some missed tackles. There were a couple other missed assignments in the back end. Not misalignments, but just missed assignments.

Once we got that tightened up we were better. But it wasn't our A game. We had a lot of A games here. I think we've given up, what, six or seven touchdowns all year, so...

**Q. Stephen Daley has come in and played nicely in the reserve role. How much does he need to step up now that Kellan is out?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, he's a guy I really wish we had a couple years because he's a tremendous athlete and once he's learned the defense, he's really making fast progress. He has size, strength, speed, suddenness. He plays hard. He was our player of the game on defense last week.

He'll take on even more of a role now.

**Q. Elite quarterback success you continue to have, regardless of quarterback changes, line changes, how are you able to do that, sustain that over a decade?**

CURT CIGNETTI: You got to have good people in your organization, coaches and players. We've had good talent on offense, right? The quarterbacks have all been a little bit different. We've played with the true dual guy. You just design around the quarterback's strengths and the offensive strengths.

I'm a big believer also that before you can win the game, you have to make sure you don't lose it. We've done a good job of protecting the ball, being balanced in the run and pass all those years. We've never been tilted heavily one way or the other.

I think Coach Whitmer has done a tremendous job developing Fernando. He wants to be a great player. He gets the most out of every day and every rep.

**Q. What are the conversations like with Scott Dolson, getting that extension, how that showed his commitment to you and the program?**

CURT CIGNETTI: He just walked in my office. Normally he comes in every Thursday and we chat about the game. He popped in right before the player meetings on either Tuesday or Wednesday, I can't remember. I was watching tape. I was really consumed with prep.

He popped in for about a minute and a half said, This is kind of what we'd like to do. Okay if we call your representative?

I said, Sure, it would be great.

Within 48 hours, 36 hours, it was done.

**Q. Your team is tied for eighth in the country with fewest penalties. Improvement from last season. What does that say about this team and the discipline they play with?**

CURT CIGNETTI: You want them to play fast. You want them to play physical. You want to be relentless. But you got to be smart. You got to make choices and decisions out on the football field, right? And the discipline.

You never want an increase in those penalties. We've had a few on the road. We've done a nice job of keeping the blocks in the front in the special teams game. Our defense



does a nice job knowing when to pull off and still rally and get multiple hats to the ball.

I've really seen that trend in the right direction the last four, five years. This team, with its veteran leadership, character and intelligence. We still had a few too many in my opinion, right? We can get better yet.

Our goal's 1 and 30 on offense, defense and teams, and has been forever and ever. So there's a lot of games we have accomplished that goal.

**Q. Omar, what did he show you this spring to win that slot spot? Why is he so good inside?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, well, he showed me a lot last fall, my first year with him, that he was an explosive player. Myles Price and Ke'Shawn Williams are both playing in the NFL right now. They split the duties in the slot.

There was a void there. We gave everybody an opportunity in spring ball. We stuck E.J. in there, Sarratt, Cooper. There were new transfers we stuck in there.

Cooper just seemed the most comfortable. He still gets his reps outside, too, in 12 personnel when we're playing with two receivers. We had the ability to put him outside even in 11 personnel.

I just think what you're seeing from him, he's older, more mature, he's a veteran now. He sees what's out there. He's just becoming a lot more consistent and explosive. He's a hard tackle.

**Q. You talked about the missed assignments in the Michigan State game. How much progress have you seen the secondary make as the season's gone on?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Since Kennesaw, Illinois, we still had a couple. Iowa we were pretty good. We had a big one against Oregon. Last week the touchdown was between the defensive end and the corner. It was more on the end. We had a couple with the safety and the corner where they got some chunks. It's improved.

I mean, what you did in the past, your past actions, all they do is create habits. You're trying to create great habits. But you got to do it every day still, too, regardless of what you did in the past.

We still have to communicate a little with more urgency, get on the line quicker, play with more urgency at some spots. We have it in us, we just got to do it.

**Q. Last year you guys had a lot of success, talked**

**about how you have to recruit, open some doors. Have you seen that carry over and keep going, even get bigger this season, as you continue to win?**

CURT CIGNETTI: We've had a lot of doors open up the high school route, for sure. The portal thing, really doesn't even open till January 2nd unless a head coach has been let go and the player has gone in the portal.

That's my thing right now, you just don't get off the portal in one year, two years. There's going to be portal needs this year. The rules, the way they are right now, I hope we take a good, hard look at what we're doing.

I don't quite understand all these players are making decisions pretty much the end of November what they're doing. Then the whole month of December's dead. Like, what are you supposed to do those 30 days, right? You know other people...

The spring portal has been valuable for us, too. Look at who we picked up that first year. CJ West, Ponds Tucker, last year Wyatt.

I am not a big fan of what we're doing. To me having the January 2nd portal date, like we start school January 9th. Doesn't make a lot of sense.

I don't think the rules should be changed for two or three coaches that really had a problem with it because they were still playing. One guy lost his backup quarterback. I mean, I think you got to look at the other schools, the other 75 or how many there are P4 schools also.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, guys.

CURT CIGNETTI: Thanks.

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