

# Indiana University Football Media Conference

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## Coach Curt Cignetti

### Press Conference



CURT CIGNETTI: Penn State this week, okay? They're in the top 25 in the ESPN football power index. 22, I think, still. Same guys they started the year with for the most part that was ranked No. 1 to No. 3 in the country, so a lot of good football players at all positions, playing really hard here.

Terry has done a really good job of sort of rejuvenating these guys, and it'll be his first opportunity to play a game at home. Tough place to play, 100,000 plus people. They're a really good football team.

They've had some tough times, and we've got to have a great day today and a great week to stack days just like always. Be prepared, have the right mindset, play really, really well, first play to last play.

Been a change up there, obviously. James Franklin, fifth in the country last year, was about 105-40 after 11 years, did a tremendous job, has always represented himself with class. A lot of respect for him and Penn State. Always have had a lot of respect for Penn State, too.

Saturday, Maryland, good win for us. I think when you look at that game, what sticks out, turnover ratio 5-1, resulting in 21 net points. Maryland was No. 1 in the country in turnover ratio coming into the game. Great job by our defense creating five turnovers, and the rushing numbers, 370 to 37. There's others; 3rd and 4th down we were 66 percent, they're 33. We had the ball 41 minutes almost, four or five touchdowns in the red area, they were two, and our defense did a great job early when the offense turned it over, holding them to a field goal.

It was a good win and got to play a lot of players.

But obviously we've turned that page, and everything in this game is earned, not given, and you've got to earn it every single day. The game gives you nothing. You get out what you put in. We've got to really be sharp this week and have a great mindset.

Questions?

**Q. Injuries, specifically Aiden, Elijah and Drew, where are they heading into this week?**

CURT CIGNETTI: We'll know more on everyone as the week progresses. We didn't really come out of that game with anything that we would call significant, just the bumps and bruises that can occur during the course of a 12-game season.

Aiden Fisher we thought made really good progress toward the end of last week. Wasn't quite ready to go. Very optimistic on him.

Elijah, we'll know more day-to-day. He's been dealing with something the last two weeks but has been able to play. Had a little tweak of something else early in the game, and we got him out for precautionary reasons.

Drew Evans will not be available this week.

**Q. The second part of it is I understand you are not taking anything for granted, but with the way that the playoff has changed the postseason structure and the way that it's changed just frankly the length of the season, do you view injuries differently when you can essentially kind of -- if there's a wider sort of path to the playoff, do you think any differently about risking a certain -- I don't want to say risking, but playing a player at a certain place in an injury or maybe giving him more time to heal knowing there might be greater opportunities deeper into the calendar, if that makes sense?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I mean, injuries are a part of the game. Some of them are outside your control. I'm always thinking about the health of our football team, which why we practice the way we practice, and if you happen to notice at the end of the games when we're running the clock and snapping the ball with two seconds, we're reducing the number of plays in the game, which we've done quite a bit in some of the games where we've gotten out ahead.

I think I know what you're asking, and the answer to that is



we take those things day-to-day and make the best decision, starting with the individual's health.

**Q. You worked to get Byron Baldwin some meaningful reps on Saturday. The players in the fall kind of raved about his progress. He suffers an injury. How did he deal with being sidelined and what do you expect from him going forward?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, he missed quite a bit of practice time, which allowed us to kind of settle in on our three starters and keep them at the same position. We've got position flexibility really with all three of those older guys.

Byron returned to practice maybe two weeks ago and got to play Saturday, so it was good to get him in there on defense. He's also playing special teams, recovered a fumble. He's a young guy that has a lot of talent.

But he's a young guy, and there's a big difference between guys that have been around the block for five years around this game and a freshman. I don't need to explain the difference between an 18-year-old and a 23-year-old to you guys; you know.

But he's got a great future. He recovered a fumble. I thought he played well. We're counting on him helping us the rest of the season.

**Q. What's been the biggest jump in Omar in terms of performance this year, including perhaps blocking, and what do you need to see more from Jonathan Brady and Charlie Becker?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think Cooper, with another year of maturity, has just become more consistent. There's still improvements to be made, like everybody else on the team. He had that drop and then another one we could have come down with. It was a tough catch, but he could have had a huge day.

But he's an explosive player. He's good after the catch, hard to tackle. He just keeps getting better and better. I think it's all in front of him. I really do. I've seen a lot of growth in Omar, and I've always been really impressed with his upside since the first spring after I got to watch him a few times and saw his explosion and suddenness.

**Q. How about Brady and Charlie?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Charlie Becker has done a good job. He's taken advantage of his opportunities and saw more playing time on Saturday. Also a real key guy on our special teams, as is Brady as a punt returner. Brady has made a few plays in the slot, also. He's just unfortunately

behind Cooper. But Cooper has got the flexibility, we can move him around, play him inside, outside, which then only increases his reps.

**Q. It was mentioned last week that Lou Moore was a guy you wanted to keep in '23. Why did you welcome him back in '24, and what's driven the kind of year that he's had?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, a lot of these guys were in the portal before I got hired. Lou Moore was one that was not, and I thought we were going to be able to retain him, and he ended up leaving. I based it on -- all these guys I had one-on-one meetings with. Benson, Lou Moore, there might be another one that came back. Off the top of my head, I can't remember.

I thought they were good players when they were here. They were productive players where they went. They saw the program change here and wanted to be a part of it.

There's no hard feelings from my side. They made a business decision. Then I made a business decision bringing them back.

**Q. A few weeks ago Penn State lost Drew Allar to an injury for the season, put in Grunkemeyer, the backup. What have you seen from his game and have they tweaked or altered their offense or are they pretty much still running what they were running before?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think week to week people are always morphing a little bit, and this is a talented guy that was very highly recruited out of high school, set a lot of records in Ohio. He's tall. He can spin the ball. He moves well enough to get out of trouble. He's made some impressive throws. He can get it out of his hand fast.

You can see with every series, every snap, he's improving and he's learning. He's a good player.

**Q. Two running backs, Singleton and Allen. What makes them so difficult to stop, and what makes them different from one another?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, having two of them makes each other even more difficult to stop because they can rotate them in and out and keep them fresh. They're both explosive. They're both fast. One might be a hair bigger than the other one, one might be a tad quicker than the other. But those are NFL guys. They were impressive against Ohio State.

**Q. I know you talked about pre-UCLA you kind of threw out the pre-coaching-change tape on them. Is**



**that similar? How does the process change when you're looking at Penn State this week?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, the defensive coordinator is still in place, and obviously we faced them last season at Ohio State, so that part of it really hasn't changed. We put a little bit more weight, obviously, on some games than others in our breakdowns. Same with the offense.

But in regards to our defensive preparation, there will be obviously a strong focus on their offense since this fella has been playing quarterback. That doesn't mean that we won't look at all the other stuff because a lot of it's core to what they do.

**Q. We've seen Fernando's arm talent grow each week, but how have you seen his ground game, his running ability grow in these first nine games?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, it's what I expected it to be, honestly. I think once he kind of learned the offense and what you're seeing from him is not only making the plays with his arm, cutting his losses, getting us out of bad situations but making extremely important plays with his legs, and I can't emphasize enough how important that is at the quarterback position. He continued to do that Saturday against Maryland.

It's a weapon, and it makes us better.

**Q. This is the second team you're facing that had a coaching change. What difficulties come with preparing for teams that have mid-season coaching changes and player changes as well at quarterback?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, it's all on tape, so you prepare for what you see on tape. So UCLA was a particular situation where there were new coordinators on both sides of the ball and had really kind of done a 180. You see Penn State really landed on the line on tape; impressed with that football team. But the coordinators are still in place, so schematically there's not a big change.

**Q. This is going to be one of those dumb sportswriter questions, but I'm trying to learn and understand. You guys rushed for 367, multiple drives, the running game. You and I talked after the game you said the offensive line was good, Fernando praised them. Looking at some of the grades, four of the five guys had grades that would be like below average. I'm confused when the line blocks that well and the team runs that well and then I see grades like that. Am I missing something? Did you guys have bad grades for them?**

CURT CIGNETTI: What grades are you referring to?

**Q. The people that do grades, like PFF and people like that.**

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I don't pay attention. I don't know anything about that. I just know when we're sitting there watching the tape and it takes us about two hours as an offensive staff to sit down together and watch the game and we'll go through every play and dissect technique, alignment technique, execution, finish, those types of things, the things that we need to correct and get better at.

I'm not really aware of the PFF grades.

**Q. From a game like Maryland, did they grade out well, average?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I think you look and there's good, bad and ugly almost every single game. You obviously want more of the good, but there's things that have to improve, whether it be hand placement, reduction in penalties. There weren't that many missed assignments. Maybe it's poor technique, okay.

As coaches you tend to focus in on areas of improvement because you're always pushing to get better and better.

But look, we wouldn't be where we are today without the line being physical, getting it done and taking over the game, and our backs are really running hard, and our tight ends are a big part of that and most of the time our receivers.

**Q. When you still have a quarter of the regular season left, playoff aspirations, what expectations do you have for your team when they're not on the practice field, when they're away from the facility on recovery and maintaining their body to be fresh come game day?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I don't think those expectations change any time of the year. If you want to be the best that you can be and you're committed to being the best you can be, you do a good job when you're in the building, you do a great job, high standards, you eat right off the field, you get your rest and you don't do things that are going to set you back. To me, whether it's November or April, it's all the same.

**Q. That third drive on Saturday, it seemed like you guys made some significant changes going to the running game. Kaelon was very effective. Practically what does that look like when you have limited time to make those changes in game? You've talked about**



**using technology. What does that process look like?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, part of that time I'm on the headset listening to what's going on on defense, and then the offensive coaches are communicating. Usually Mike will communicate with Bob about the run game and Chandler about the pass game, and we kind of came off the ball and got north-south with our run game a little bit.

I can't remember every play of that drive off the top of my head, but Fernando may have had a good run that series. Maybe it's a point of emphasis.

From my standpoint, we needed to get the game settled down. Our first series we had an interception, guy jumped a route, we held them to a field goal. Second series we didn't get anything done and they had great field position again. Defense held them.

Now we had the ball, I believe, on the minus 7, all right, and my message to Mike and the offensive staff was patience, that we just needed to weather the storm, chip away and get our feet on the ground, which we did. I've seen a lot of those kind of starts have the potential to really snowball against you. I thought we did a good job managing that situation.

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