

Indiana University Football Media Conference

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Bloomington, Indiana, USA

Coach Curt Cignetti

Press Conference



Indiana 31, Wisconsin 7

CURT CIGNETTI: That was pretty enthusiastic. Sixth game in a row at the end of the year and it showed, I thought, in the first half. We looked kind of tired and a little bit lethargic. But I do give Wisconsin credit for playing with a lot of energy, winning at halftime.

What's always worked for me in these situations and worked today again is instead of going in there and kind of rip-snores at halftime, just telling everybody to take a deep breath, relax, have fun, go out there and play one play at a time.

I thought we played a good second half, and we had a lot of great individual performances. It's our 11th win in a row, one more than last year and one more than this staff had the year prior to that.

But it will be great to enter an off-week now and get the players some rest. The coaches too, really, the assistant coaches. I may even adjust what I normally do. We don't do much on off weeks, just stay sharp. But we need some rest.

We've got to get some guys back. Got a lot of guys out there playing that are banged up, and we've got to get healed up as good as possible.

Questions?

Q. When you took over, you talked about making Memorial Stadium a more formidable place to play. How important has that been to your transformation as a program?

CURT CIGNETTI: Oh, I think our crowd -- our fans are the best in America. I know everybody says that that's got it going and packs the house, but I love our fans. I know where we started and where we are now, and they are over the top. I can't say enough good things about them.

We feed off of their energy. I really think that us playing at

home is at least a 14-point advantage.

Q. Number one, just kind of what's up with Mikail? It seemed like he started and had to come out for something injury-wise. Number two, you talk about the bye; especially in a season where guys are going to understand what you're chasing at 11-0, how much is the mental rest as much as the physical rest valuable at this time of year?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, it's huge, and Mikail Kamara has been dealing with kind of a shoulder nerve stinger issue, which is pretty common for a football player. Those things tend to show up a lot more this time of year, a culmination of all the banging.

We have seven, eight guys in that same boat. But Kamara's had been a lingering issue, and he's another guy that needs rest and needs to get away.

Q. Obviously Fernando Mendoza, "Heismandoza" as everybody has been calling him, sets the record, touchdowns in a single season. Your thoughts on him getting to that level?

CURT CIGNETTI: I can't say enough about the job that he has done in terms of dedicating himself to the process of improvement and that Chandler Whitmer has done also in accelerating his development. He's come such a long way since we got him from Cal.

But I still think that he's barely scratched the surface of his potential. I think that much of him.

He's a little bit new to the position, really, when you look at him and his background and growing up in terms of his opportunities to get snaps in whether it was junior high or high school even.

I thought he was great today, 22 of 24, four touchdowns, broke the school record for touchdown passes, 30, and of course that's a team effort. It doesn't happen all by yourself.

But I thought he was very poised. Very poised, yeah.



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Q. Can you talk about the execution on both sides of the ball? You had one penalty, no turnovers, that type of execution, to sustain that?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, and I think we're No. 1 in the country in turnover ratio, if I'm not mistaken, which leads to points. It's huge. Penalties to an absolute minimum. 1 in 30 is our goal on offense, defense and special teams. Now, they only had one, also. Look at the tape, and you never know, we may have our hands outside every other play, I don't know.

But we talk about that a lot. Before you win a game, you can't lose a game. How do you lose a game? You lose a game by turning the ball over, pre-snap penalties, undisciplined penalties, right? Like 4th down, for instance, today; you think I liked punting the ball 4th and 1, 4th and 3 in minus territory? I didn't like it at all. But the way that game was going today in the first half, the only way you lose that game is if you start to do things that are not good football decisions, and they backfire on you because they weren't going to score that many points on us.

But I've been proud of our team all year long in terms of the discipline. Got to keep it going.

Q. Coach, you talked last week that you kind of let Penn State hang around. Was there a point in this game, especially after that fumble and scoring a touchdown that you stepped on their neck and started to put them out of striking distance?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, I thought the second half was really clean. Final score was 31-7, and it was 10-7 at halftime, so we won the second half 21-0. It was a little bit of a different first half for sure. I don't think anybody was really satisfied. It is one of the things I talked to the team about this week and before the game was playing four quarters because I didn't feel like we did that the week prior.

Q. You just mentioned the offense was much more effective in the second half. In the first half were they doing things that you didn't expect or was it more about execution? What changes did you make at halftime to kind of get it going?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, you know, I think sometimes it's just the momentum of the game. They get the ball first, and they haven't been scoring a lot of points, but they go on an eight-minute drive, convert a couple 3rd downs, and you just don't have that many opportunities. Then all of a sudden in the second half we get the opening drive and we go down and score a touchdown and the place is rocking,

we're getting the momentum, and next thing you know we're getting a turnover on defense, great field position, another touchdown.

Sometimes momentum plays and circumstances of the game play a lot into it rather than the Xs and Os. You may run the same play in the second half three times that you ran three times in the first half and all of a sudden you do it better in the second half because guys are doing their job and doing it better.

Q. You said instead of going into half and ripping them a little bit, you eased up a little bit. I don't think you were being sarcastic, but is that a lesson you've had to learn throughout your career?

CURT CIGNETTI: It's just something that worked for me I think my second year at IUP too. I remember we were playing a team that had set the record for losses in a row. This team was 12-1 at the end of the regular -- really good football team that I had. At home, 7-7, halftime, and it was just, hit me, and I've done that ever since, and it's always worked.

Q. This core group of seniors that's played such a big role the last two years, how bittersweet was it to see them play their potentially last game as an IU player here?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, it's hard for me to look at it that way because we all understand what we've accomplished together and what's down the road. We don't know for a fact that it is our last game here at home. We hope it is. It's kind of weird to say; I get it.

We'll see what happens. We've got a rival game coming up in two weeks, and then hopefully we'll see what happens after that.

Q. Today when the Wisconsin player got hurt and was down for quite a while, you gathered your entire team around. What were you saying to the entire team in that moment?

CURT CIGNETTI: Yeah, that's another one that I've learned from through the years. We've had a couple of those. The great news is this particular individual has feelings in his extremities. They're going to continue to test. But I had a couple football teams that had big leads and were in that same situation, and after that ended up losing. They happened later in the game, too, late in the game.

It's hard there because you're not trying to be callous; you're not separating the football from the human element.



We prayed -- first thing we did was we took a knee and we prayed. Then we kind of refocused everybody for the game. It's great to hear the positive news up to this point on that individual, the running back from Maryland.

Q. You promised a winning program and suggested you could turn this town from a basketball town into a football town. What does that mean to you?

CURT CIGNETTI: Well, I don't know if it's like a basketball town to a football town. I don't know what it is, but like this staff, a lot of us have been together a long time, and we've got a pretty good track record, and we just came here and the same things kind of happened, even more so. I think it's got everybody's attention because it's a bigger stage.

I think I mentioned this last week. When you look at my journey and all the things and the changes in college football, it all kind of came together. Like the transfer portal -- this doesn't happen 10 years ago. A big reason this happens is because we're in free agency right now, and a big part of my training was not only coaching but being a GM or recruiting coordinator or evaluator.

It's really hard for me to step back sometimes and think about what we've accomplished here. But it takes people, the right coaches and the right players in the locker room, properly led, and got to have a blueprint plan, standards, expectations, and just improve daily and create the right mindset, and we've been fortunate to have great people.

The head coach and the quarterback get too much credit and too much blame, but it's been fun, and let's have more fun.

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