

# Indiana University Football Media Conference

Wednesday, November 19, 2025

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

## Fernando Mendoza

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Thank you for joining us. We have redshirt junior quarterback Fernando Mendoza here for you.

**Q. Hi, Fernando. Thanks for the time today. My first question for you, you have a remarkable ability to look a camera in the eye when you are speaking, and your general public speaking persona, I'm wondering how that came about.**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: That is a great question. I would say that eye contact is something that my mom has instilled in me from a young age and a lot of coaches have instilled in me from a young age. From youth football to high school to college, people have always told me you listen with your eyes, not your ears.

Whenever I would be taking a knee, coach after practice, I'd be looking around like la, la, la, and they'd say, Fernando, look at me. Looking someone in the eye not only shows importance but it shows that you care about their time and care about being there. So it's something I always try to reflect.

**Q. Can you take me through what it's been like having your brother at your side through this season? And then can you detail the pride that you two guys have in your Cuban family roots?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Definitely, yeah. I think it's been such a fantastic experience. Myself and one of my main pillars is always stay in the present moment in order to make the most of the present moment because the future is just a whole string of nows.

However, playing with my brother in college football is something that, when I'm 60 years old, I'm able to look on and take great fulfillment in. Take great fulfillment in and to have been able to share such a great and special experience with Alberto.

Alberto and I play football not for ourselves, not for fulfillment and satisfaction of ourselves, we have a lot of

whys why we do it for. One of the whys is our mom. Another why is our entire family. Our entire family comes from a Cuban background. All of our grandparents were born and raised in Cuba, and that's something we always take deeply to heart. Alberto and I visited Cuba one time back in high school.

That's something that's always in the back of our mind, not only playing for ourselves, but playing for more, whether it's our family, our nationality, or God.

**Q. How have you kind of -- I mean, the quarterback's in the spotlight all the time no matter what locally and everything and your team, but how have you felt you've dealt with the national spotlight? Have you found it to be challenging at all as this has kind of picked up through the season?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, I'd love to sit here and lie to you and say it's been smooth. However, I would say it's a little challenging. With any challenge there's always an opportunity in it: The opportunity to praise the Lord, praise my teammates, praise my coaches. So whenever the challenge presents itself, I like to see it as an opportunity. I like to see it as an opportunity to talk to all you wonderful folk, such a great opportunity to talk to the national media, local media, or whatever it is.

With the spotlight, and with the pressure of it comes a privilege. We are so blessed to be 11-0 at this point, and right now we're just focused on being 1-0. Like you said, there are some challenges, but it's honestly such a great opportunity to give the praise to other people around in this program that they deserve.

**Q. Can you maybe share one of the challenges that you've found?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, I would say -- not this Zoom specifically, but throughout the entire season, as the season ramped up and really after the Illinois week, there's a lot more media requests that we got from our team, and I want to shout out Mr. Campbell for helping us, for helping myself.



Instead of front loading my media, saving it till the bye week so I'm able to maintain my normal Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday routine that's been working. So I'm able to keep that consistency rather than throw a wrench in the schedule where I need to take a two hour off or a media interview, which is fantastic because we want to highlight the IU program, want to highlight our teammates, and honestly I want to highlight what we're doing here at Indiana.

I think it's great the schedule that we've had, and this Zoom itself, I think, is a great representation with how we've dealt with those challenges and made the most of our opportunities.

**Q. I've heard you mention your mom a couple of times and her being your why. I wonder if there's an anecdote you could tell us about when that became very, very clear to you that your mom was going to be your why playing football?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: First of all, thank you, Mr. Young, for being on the Zoom, really like your stuff.

Our mom was always my inspiration in life from a young age. She's the one that taught me to throw a football. She was an amazing athlete herself. She was actually a tennis player at the University of Miami.

Throughout a young age, she was always there by my side. She was the overprotective mom per se, and she has always been a positive light and inspiration before and after MS. And to see her maintain that positivity and light through what she's been struggling with, it's never gave myself an excuse to have a bad day.

Whether it's a bad lift, bad practice, or bad game, when I see her and what she's going through and how she's fighting, how hard her fight is, I'm never, ever in a situation where I think that I can feel down on myself and not have a positive attitude and a smile on my face.

With her, it's always that unwavering belief. There's an interview that I saw that Tom Brady said all the greats always have someone with unwavering love and confidence in that person, whether it's a parent, whether it's an uncle, whether it's a brother or sister, and I think that person for myself is my mom.

Not saying by any means that I'm a great or anything like that, but I would say that she's been a huge part of my success, and someone like that has been a huge part of a lot of people's success in the past.

Whether it was in high school, when I was crying on my

bed, like, wow, I really want to play college football. I think I'm better than a lot of these kids, but I'm getting no offer. Don't worry, your first offer is going to come. Then it was Yale, and that was one of the best days of my life. Then after that, she's like, you're going to get a Power 4 offer. I'm like, Mami, FIU and FAU aren't even offering me. How am I going to get a Power 4 offer? I'm out here, just grateful for a D-I FCS offer, then I ended up coming.

When I got in first at Cal, she was like, you're going to do great. You're going to help turn that program around. I'm like I don't even know. I'm on the sideline here. I don't even know if I can play. These guys are moving so fast.

Whatever she said has came to light, and I just can't thank her enough for everything that she's been a part of my journey, and that is really my why.

Both my parents are my why because my dad and my mom are such great inspirations and role models to myself, but really just the pillars that my mom has, instructing me from a young age with that unwavering belief and confidence in myself has really exponentially increased my success here in the football space.

**Q. In the history of college football, we've had one player of Hispanic or Latino descent who has won the Heisman Trophy. That was Jim Plunkett back in 1970. We could potentially see two players of Latino and Hispanic descent be nominated for the Heisman Trophy with you and Diego at Vandy. I guess I just wonder for you what does that mean to be able to represent two communities in the sports realm that you could say are historically under represented from a football perspective?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: I would say, first of all, it's such an honor. I've seen a lot of Diego's stuff throughout his years, when he was back at New Mexico State, because he beat Auburn over there and we played Auburn the next year. So I've watched his highs before, and I've seen his amazing journey through Vandy.

To be able to have that opportunity and honor to be able to not only do something for yourself but also to glorify into a nationality and to put on for a larger audience is always such an honor and great opportunity. That is something like we talked about before, it's my why. It's not only my family, it's the people around me, whether it's the program, my nationality, and then it's God.

I would say that it is such an honor to be able to have that privilege. However, I don't want to get too far ahead of myself. Right now all my focus is on in this present moment, the Zoom, and then overall this week it's on

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Purdue. Although we have a bye week this week, it is still on Purdue because they are a great football team and organization there.

It would be an honor, but honestly I can't control those things. I can't control who gets invited, who gets nominated, who wins. Right now I'm just trying to make the most of my present moment and enjoy it while it is.

**Q. I'm curious, you've talked in the past about why you picked Indiana in terms of Coach Cignetti. Why do you think it has worked so well between you two?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah. When I entered the transfer portal, it was a little bit of a whirlwind. There was a couple schools that I was heavily considering, and it was a really tough decision. It was a really tough decision not only to leave the University of California Berkeley, but to choose Indiana.

I would say a big part of that decision was my little brother because he was able to tell me the good and the bad of Indiana while I was trying to figure out the good and bad at these other schools. Not to say there was bad at the other schools or bad at Indiana, just the pros and cons of each situation there.

I thought the other schools were going to have fantastic teams and fantastic outlooks on the season, and that's what they sold me on. Coach Cignetti, on the other hand, sold me on being the best Fernando Mendoza that I could become. Whatever happens, that I'm going to become the best quarterback -- if I have a crystal ball and I can see my future at every single school, IU I become the best quarterback. I don't know if we would be the best team, but I would be the best quarterback.

At this point, that's all I can control. I can control being the best Fernando Mendoza quarterback and character that I can become. That's what really sold me. My reason for entering the transfer portal is wanting to develop and wanting to take that next step, that next growth.

When he sold me on that, I knew it was a done deal, especially with my brother being here and being able to help me so much with the offense, the lingo, the terminology, and the whole aura and space of Bloomington as well. I thought it was a no brainer, and so far it's been a good decision, but need to keep on proving that decision right.

**Q. Fernando, first of all, thank you for doing this. I'm going to interview your father and Coach Dunn in about two hours at your high school. So I'm going to be talking to them here shortly. Thank you for doing**

**this, really appreciate it, especially being a Hoosier alum myself, class of '95. I've got to ask you, how does it feel not only to represent Hoosier nation, but to represent South Florida on such a big stage?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Hoosier nation has welcomed me with open arms. Ever since I got here, it's always been everything's been positive. Everything's been positive, and it's such a warm and cozy town and that feel where it's such a tight community. Whether it's a football player, basketball player, or student, everybody's always welcoming and it's always positive support.

For myself, I haven't received any negative backlash, which is huge, especially at such a high football program that sometimes, if there's an off game or something, you never know. I would say that Hoosier nation has really welcomed me as one of their own, and I can't thank them enough for it, and it's really meant a lot to me and my family throughout this entire season, more than anyone could ever imagine.

South Florida, I believe, is the hotbed of football. It is not only the best speed down there. I think it's the best overall high school football down there although a lot of people would say that Texas and California are up there. I believe in the quality of football in South Florida, and I think that's what helped me develop.

When I went to college, the first thing a lot of people say is the game gets sped up. However, for me it's only just a little bit of increment, because evidently most college players are better than high school players, but I would say it's because of my environment in South Florida. There's a lot of other states, like Texas and California, that have had great players.

However for myself and the speed of the game, especially for the processing point of the quarterback, it's been so special for myself to be able to have those experiences playing against our corner D'Angelo Ponds, who's an All-American corner, playing against the Jeremiah Smiths, playing against all these different, other players that have gone on and had fantastic success in their college and in the NFL careers. In order, as a quarterback, to have that processing speed, to have that experience of, okay, I'm going to get got sometimes, but I need to bounce back and have some resiliency and to get them again or to come on top and have that win.

With such a great football program like Christopher Columbus football is, it's not only helped me become a better person, but it's also helped me become a great football player with the coaching that Coach Dunn and all the coaches over there has provided.



**Q. I'm going to try to sneak in two questions here, the first one being just a couple weeks ago Marcel Reed was praising you, praising your personality, and telling us that you guys had a great summer together training. I wanted to know if you could share a little bit about that personality and if there's a memory that really sticks out. Secondly, if you can, if you could tell me what being Cuban means to you in terms of likely having a chance at being the third Latino to win the Heisman Trophy.**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: First of all, Marcel and I were able to train for a weekend over the summer, and he was a great guy. I know his success at Texas A&M, and he was one of the emerging college superstars, and I was able to see it on the field. When we were playing and training on the field together, we were having not only a great time, but I was able to see what a fantastic player he is.

After we worked out, we actually stayed at the same quarterback trainer's house together, and it was great. Playing NCAA together, the video game, talking, hanging out -- he's just a really good and genuine guy, and what you see is what you get with Marcel. It's not some type of persona or front that he puts on. He is really just a genuine and nice guy.

That's someone I've been so excited to see his success because obviously he's a great football player. He's in the Heisman talks, and his team is doing fantastic at A&M, but also just what a great guy he is as a person. That's a guy that I would like to hang out with, that I would like to hang out with again, whether it's just getting dinner. Whether you play football or not, that's a guy you'd like to hang out with and kick it with.

**Q. You mentioned this week in an interview that one of the things that Coach Cignetti at Indiana sold you on when you come here is being the best version of yourself, the best Fernando Mendoza. Where do you think you've improved the most as a player? I'm sure he's been a big part of it, but what has Coach Whitmer meant to you in your improvement since you came to Bloomington?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: I don't think I can put it in words how much Coach Whitmer has meant to me, not only on the physical standpoint but also the mental standpoint in the game. He's been such a blessing and honestly one of the huge reasons that I've been having the season we've had so far, especially from a quarterback play standpoint.

He's really helped me go from a raw prospect to more refined. There's still a long way to go. This half of the

screen to here, a long way to go. But we went from here, and I would say we made a good jump. We've made a good jump.

Coach Whitmer, whether it's honestly basically hanging out the entire summer day watching film or talking on the phone, talking about footwork, it's been such a blessing for my brother and I and the entire quarterback room to have Coach Whitmer be a part of it as he's such a great coach, not only physically with technique, but he's so smart off the field mentally.

He reminds me of one of these young superstar coaches like a Sean McVay. To have him there be my quarterback coach and to help have his input in the offense, along with Coach Cignetti and Coach Shanahan, Coach Whitmer has stepped up above and beyond to help me become the best Fernando Mendoza. It's still a long journey, a long season to go, and a lot of improvement to do, but to have him has been truly special.

Just the overall understanding of the game, the footwork and timing and anticipation, and how good players never get bored. You don't need to be a superstar. You don't need to make a superman play. You just need to make the right play with the right read with the right timing with the right technique.

So those are things he's really harped on myself, on taking it one play at a time, that has really helped myself exponentially grow this year.

**Q. When you have a bye week like this, obviously everything is so focused on the present and what's upcoming, but have you been able to reflect on maybe a moment, a play, a game this season where you, the guys in the locker room, really felt that this team had something special brewing?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, it seems like for this team there's a new moment every single week, whether it was Iowa, Oregon, Penn State, or any of the other victories that we honestly played really great team football.

There's a lot of memories I really do enjoy, but I would say just the whole season of resiliency and using our super power, and our super power is playing together. That comes from not just hanging out in the locker room, but hanging out outside of football, and just really being close and really a band of brothers together by not only caring about the football players as teammates, but also caring about the football players as brothers. I think that's really helped us, that has really established this team as a one-heartbeat operation.





**Q. I'm kind of curious, it seems like the best players are at their best under adverse conditions. You've had some games where there's been an interception, a sack, and it seems like then your resolve really kicks in. Can you kind of talk about the process and how you approach some of these end of game situations?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: Yeah, I grew up watching my football idol Tom Brady. He was the man, and he strived in those resilient situations. As someone who's dealt with a lot of adversity in high school, in the recruiting process, that's something I've always been able to fall back on.

I would say like there's been a lot of games, especially at Cal, that I've been punched in the face before. Not literally, but if some adversity were to happen like that. That has been a great learning lesson for myself in order how to respond to that punch. When they give you a jab, to duck. You might get hit by the jab, but you're going to give them an uppercut and knock them out.

I would say the resiliency is a huge part of my game. It's really about the performance. I meet with a mental psychologist, a sports psychologist every week, and I think that's helped my game exponentially as we're always focusing on what we can control. The next play is what we can control. That's the most important thing. You can't control the last play no matter how hard you think or how hard you try. There's no time machine that you can go back in time.

I would say it's all about being grateful and having gratitude in the present moment, allowing your nervous system, whenever you're nervous in those particular situations, just say, hey, that's my body getting ready. That's my body that's going to play better in these situations because it's giving my body more energy and more focus.

Then it's really just controlling the controllables in the present moment rather than looking at the surroundings. Whether it's Penn State, Oregon, or Iowa, that the stadium is absolutely rocking and the ground is shaking, to really focus on the present moment and your technique and how you can control that play.

**Q. Curt Cignetti has had a lot of success with quarterbacks and you're the latest of course, great year last year for Kurtis Rourke. What is it about Curt and what he does with the quarterbacks? I know it's not just Coach Cignetti, but you get a lot of input from a lot of coaches. What is it about him with the quarterbacks? What does he give to you that is just that something that was missing to your arsenal?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: I would say that I get a lot of

coaching from the other coaches, like you mentioned. Coach Whitmer and Coach Shanahan have both been great football mentors to myself.

I would say Coach Cignetti is a great institutionalizer. When the team is better, the quarterback plays better, and that's something that he always does. He always holds us to a high standard, whether it's the quarterback position, the offensive line position, or the linebacker position. So that standard raises the tide for everybody.

I would say that's what makes so many quarterbacks successful. Whether people want to say it or not, being a successful quarterback is a lot by situation. The situation that Coach Cignetti has not only coached his quarterbacks into, but put his quarterback into, has made a lot of quarterbacks successful such as myself.

**Q. When you look at kind of handling that Heisman hype, what advice have you heard that's really helped you just kind of really stock throughout that process of handling that?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: I was able to talk to Matt Leinart a couple of weeks ago, and he's a Heisman Trophy winner, fantastic quarterback, and has a great TV personality. His advice was similar to what I got from a lot of the others, but it really stuck with me is this only happens once -- unless you're Tim Tebow. But a lot of people only go through this once, and they end up heading to the NFL or just things happen. Just enjoy it. Take the present moment in.

This is so special that although you can kick the can down the road, what an honor it is and how grateful, just giving all the glory to God and how great it is that I'm in this situation and that you're in this situation.

So whenever I hear about it, I'm thankful about it. I don't have anxiety looking forward to it like, oh, what's going to happen here and there, what if, what if, what if. Wow, that's so cool. I never thought I'd be in this moment at this point. I've just got to be grateful for it and keep on chugging because all that matters is this bye week and Purdue.

**Q. Fernando, when you played football in the backyard growing up, just what did you kind of picture your future in the sport looking like? Being in this Heisman race, was that something you dreamed about playing in the NFL? What did your journey look like when you were a kid?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: I've always been a huge football fan. Always been a college football fan, high school football fan, and an NFL fan. Whenever I was in the



backyard playing with Alberto, we'd make up high pressure situations, whether it was University of Miami versus University of Florida in the National Championship or the Patriots versus the Dolphins. Whatever the situation was, it was a high pressure situation.

I know it's really helped my game about -- I know it sounds silly because it's in the backyard and it's not actual schematic football, but I think it's helped myself a lot throughout my journey.

I always hear a lot of people come back to, whether I was in preschool, kindergarten -- not preschool, but elementary school, high school, saying just work hard, anything's possible. At that age, you always think, cool, yeah, yeah, yeah. Did I ever think it was possible if I were to bet money on it? No. But it's so great what God's plan is and what you can do with a strong work ethic and a great support cast around you.

I wouldn't say this is the pinnacle of my career by any chance. I think I still have a long way to go. I still think I'm a raw quarterback prospect. However, it's been great to be part of this opportunity.

At a young age, I didn't have a young crystal ball. I wasn't this young prodigy, who was a five star coming out of high school or the next big thing, but I would say I'm just so grateful to be in the position that I am right now. I just can't thank the support staff I have around myself enough and can't thank the Lord enough.

**Q. Coach Cignetti said you guys needed the bye week. How do you balance getting enough rest both mentally and physically and keeping sharp? Then also, you have Purdue coming up. Have you learned the significance of that rivalry? Can you feel it in the building? What's your take on just playing for the Old Oaken Bucket?**

FERNANDO MENDOZA: As soon as I got here, everyone's talked about the Oaken Bucket, the rivalry with Purdue. A lot of them are calling them Pur-don't. However, I've never played them, so I can't call them anything because they're a great football team on film and something to be taken extremely serious. Watching them on film, they're a really good football team.

It's going to be a tough, gritty match. I think the weather conditions, it might snow over there, which would be really interesting.

I just can't wait to get a bite at the rivalry just to be able to experience it, be able to play in it against such a great team, such a great defense that they have. It's such an

honor. It is such an honor to play Purdue, and not only to get here, but see the Purdue rivalry within basketball, which is a huge rivalry, and football and really just see the alumni and how they harp on it.

Really just can't wait to keep the Oaken Bucket and control the controllables in order for us to do so.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

