

# Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Indiana

Monday, December 22, 2025

Pasadena, California, USA

**Indiana Hoosiers**

**Coach Curt Cignetti**

Press Conference

CURT CIGNETTI: Two days into our prep, obviously, need to have a great two weeks of preparation against a great Alabama football team. The team's excited about it, but folks going through the process.

Got a lot of respect for Alabama, Coach DeBoer. I've been following his program for a long time. He kind of started out lower level like I did. Ever since he went to Washington, have really studied his offense. And I think he's a great coach.

**Q. Working on a story about your receiving corps, particularly Sarratt and Cooper and what's made them elite receivers. Just like to get your thoughts from the head coach's chair, why are they so good? What's the best trait for each one of them, if it's similar or different?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Sarratt and Cooper have both been starters for two years. Now, when you look at the core, you've got to include E.J. Williams and Charlie Becker in that group as well who have made a lot of big plays for us this season, Becker, particularly, the last four games.

And Sarratt is a guy that just loves football. He's a football guy. He's got great hands. He's really good at contested catches. He's an extremely intelligent football player. He's got good size and made a lot of big plays for us. Started out at the Division I-AA, or FCS, level, and then joined us at JMU and then came with us to Indiana.

Cooper, Omar Cooper, is from Indianapolis. He was on the team in '23 and played a role in '23, the year before I came, and made big plays for us in '24, and has elevated his game in '25.

And he's an explosive guy. He's really good after the catch, and just has a lot of potential and ability. And he's become more consistent. Still has more consistency, steps



in consistency he can take. But I've seen him really progress and evolve.

**Q. I think on your last Zoom with us, you mentioned getting through all the retention discussions, kind of, the week before you guys jumped into prep. How important was it to get through the calendar is structured right now? And did it give you a clearer picture in what you need to know as things open up again right after this game's done, too?**

CURT CIGNETTI: It's critical, and it certainly did clear the picture up quite a bit because the emphasis, before we knew who the opponent would be, was on the '27 team and retention and needs. And we've got a few practices in as well to stay sharp and got refreshed and got in the weight room.

But we're probably 95 percent through, what I would call the key guys, sort of the guys that everybody knows. So we're almost home in that front.

**Q. You spent several seasons in Tuscaloosa before becoming a head coach. I'm wondering what your memories are in your time at Alabama and what the program means to you.**

CURT CIGNETTI: We had a great experience at Alabama. It was real important part of my journey. Learned a lot from Coach Saban in terms of organization, standards, stopping complacency. I wouldn't be where I am today without my time under Nick.

My family really enjoyed Tuscaloosa. We had great years there. We took over a team, we were 7-6 and 12-0 the next year in the regular season. Fell short in the SEC game to Tebow and Florida and Urban. And then had a rematch the next year and beat them and won the national championship out at the Rose Bowl.

So we had four really good years there, and then began another part of our life.

**Q. I know last season there was a lot of talk about the layoff for the teams that get the first-round bye. I'm**



**curious for you, have you enjoyed kind of having more time to kind of prepare and get the team healthy? Or would you have preferred to maybe get this game played a little sooner than when you guys played the Big 10 title game?**

CURT CIGNETTI: It is what it is, so you make the most of it. The way we approached it until we knew the opponent, we treated it like two bye weeks. Now we have almost two weeks to prepare for the opponent.

Would I prefer to play earlier? Yeah, I probably would, to be quite honest with you. But that's not the case. We're excited about playing. We're off to a good start. And it will be a tremendous challenge.

**Q. Obviously last time you talked to us, brought up the fact that Stephen Daley, out for likely the rest of the season. What's the process for trying to find the next avenue to replace that production? And what does that process look like over the next couple of weeks?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Bryant Haines does a great job coordinating our defense and we have a lot of confidence in our players. And we'll find the best solution that gives us the best chance to be successful.

**Q. Wanted to circle back to your time at Alabama. I'm sure we've asked you about this in some shape or form, but that was your last stop, obviously, before you started your career as a head coach, and I'm just curious, whether it's since you knew Alabama was your opponent or at various different times, have you reflected on the pieces of kind of what you call the blueprint that you might have taken from your time at Alabama, whether it's the way you build a roster, whether it's the way you sort of maintain a staff, a locker room? Are there things that are kind of in that blueprint for you that you can say that was something I formed in my mind when I was at Alabama?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I probably think about it every single day, to be quite honest, because it had such a big impact in my growth and development. I think philosophically, the program that we run here is probably a lot more the same than different than Alabama. There's probably not a day that goes by where I don't draw from those experiences.

**Q. You've probably at least watched Alabama and the Oklahoma game. What was it about their team that you saw that you took away, probably didn't pay attention to them during the regular season, now obviously a good reason for that? What about their team has caught your attention and something you have to plan for, most of all, do you think?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I actually did get to watch some of them early in the year because we had a couple of bye weeks, and I'm a film junkie. And I've always enjoyed studying Coach DeBoer's offenses from the time he was at Washington. I got to watch their first Georgia game and some of their other things. They do a lot of really great stuff.

In terms of the Oklahoma game, that was a tremendous comeback on the road in a hostile environment. To come back from 17 points down and come out with a win, I think it tells you a lot about the character of their football team. They've got a lot of great players. They're extremely well-coached. So they're a really good team. It will be a tremendous challenge.

**Q. With Haines and Mike, just what kind of went into locking them up in this time period? And just how did you kind of approach them? And how did their whole process unfold there?**

CURT CIGNETTI: Both those guys have been with me a long time. They both do a great job.

Bryant had some calls, had some people very seriously interested in him. We thought it was important to be proactive.

We also wanted to lock Mike up, who's very deserving. And I'm glad we did.

And at the end of the season we'll move on with the rest of staff.

**Q. How instrumental were you in recruiting Julio?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I mean, I think I played a role. But I think the most important guy, when I was there in terms of the recruiting process, was Coach Saban, who is a tremendous recruiter.

Lance Thompson was the lead recruiter, who was a great recruiter as well. Major Applewhite was involved also because he was the offensive coordinator, and myself because I was a position coach.

So it was a team effort, but if I had to rank the importance, it would have been Coach Saban and Lance Thompson.

**Q. What did Nick say to you or what was the conversation like when you told him you were going to IUP?**

CURT CIGNETTI: He had some questions about whether



that would be a very good move for me. I was just ready to kind of run my own show. I had been an assistant coach -- I was hitting 50, and really I started my full-time coaching career at age 23 at Rice University when they were in the Southwest Conference. So I'd been doing it 28 years.

I was just ready for something different. I respected his opinion, but I decided to make the move. I can't say there weren't many mornings early on where I wondered what I did because it was such a tremendous, radical change. But at the end of the day, it prepared me for where I am today.

**Q. I'm working on a story on Riley Nowakowski. Could you talk about his development, both as a runner, a blocker and a receiver?**

CURT CIGNETTI: The first thing I would tell you about him is he's a great person. He's a great worker. He's always up. He's intelligent. He's one of the team leaders, without a doubt. He's very consistent day in and day out. You know what you're getting. He's a better athlete than a lot of people realize.

He went to Wisconsin as a walk-on fullback. Was a wrestler in high school as well. When they made a coaching change and quit using a fullback, they moved him to tight end.

He's made some really big plays for us in the pass game in terms of taking short routes and extending those, breaking tackles and making big, explosive plays. Obviously made a real nice down-the-field catch against Penn State in the two-minute drive.

And he gives it everything he's got. And he's not your prototypical 6'6", 260-pound tight end. But darn, I'm sure glad we got him.

**Q. You guys are dealing with a January 1st game and then the portal opens on January 2nd. What can you say about how you're going about handling those dual tracks? And do you think there's a better way for this calendar to be set up?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I definitely think the calendar could be improved. And that would be unanimous amongst the coaches. Whether you got to move the start of the regular season up a week and start playing in the playoffs when the season ends so there's a little bit better time to devote to high school recruiting and portal recruiting, we're all looking, I think, for that solution.

What you're doing within college football is just you don't have one guy in charge. If you had one person calling the

shots, I think it would be a lot cleaner. So hopefully we'll make some progress in that regard.

**Q. You're playing in the Rose Bowl. What does this mean to the fans, to your team, to be on this big stage with Indiana at this time of the year?**

CURT CIGNETTI: The Rose Bowl's got a lot of great tradition. A lot of great players and teams have competed in that game. We went to the playoffs last season, fell short, weren't happy with the way we played. So we definitely want to improve upon that.

We're playing a great opponent that has a history of tremendous success. And the Rose Bowl's a great venue to play that game at. We played out there against UCLA last year. So we've been there once before. It ought to be a tremendous environment.

**Q. Louis Moore dealt with his whole eligibility situation early in the year and all those questions with that for really like the first month or so of the year. He went on to have an All-American season. What's allowed him to thrive this year? And how big has his presence been in the secondary for you?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I'm really happy for Louis. Like you said, he to overcome some obstacles to get where he is today. He actually was a starter on the team the year before I came. Went in the portal when I was hired. Went to Ole Miss, and then saw what we were doing here and returned for this even.

He had that NCAA thing hanging over his head during fall camp and the first three or four games of the season. So I'm sure that was a distraction. Once he got that behind him, boy, he really came on.

And he's got great ball skills and football instincts. And he's been a huge part of our defensive success.

**Q. We asked you about sort of just how to adjust after Stephen Daley, and the question was more philosophical. When you have a layoff like this, is it a next-man-up situation? Do you consider maybe moving some pieces around? Like you've got a player like Mario Landino, who's played some edge before. Do you consider maybe shifting some things schematically because you'll a little bit have more time to work on stuff? When you have someone you rely on that much that may not be available, how do you approach, with more time to prepare, the solutions for sort of filling that gap?**

CURT CIGNETTI: I think, like you said, it's a little bit of all.

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And I guess we'll see when we play the game what we decide to do, right?

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