Elliot's Saturday Slate:

CURT CIGNETTI REALLY DOES WIN – JUST GOOGLE HIM

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When Indiana welcomed Curt Cignetti to their football program, they did not just hire a coach — they made a statement.

"It's pretty simple, I win. Google Me." Cignetti said at his first press conference as Indiana's new coach back in 2023.

Many fans thought of the statement as cocky and arrogant but have since retracted their statements. This comes following the hoisting of the National Championship Trophy by Indiana earlier this week.

With the football program dating back to the 1890s, they were not always successful; they had no National Championships until this year.

For a program struggling so much for so long, it was time for a change.

Cignetti built the program focusing less on stars and top talent, and more on developing a roster to become one cohesive unit. To put into perspective, the Hoosiers did not have a single five-star player on their roster and still walked away with the Natty. This may change the way coaches look for players in the future as it has now proven success does not come from talent alone.

They quickly found a breakthrough with their new coach going 11-1 last season, before falling to Notre Dame in the College Football Playoffs.

Kicking off the 2025 season, the Bloomington program started No. 20 in the AP preseason poll but their loss column remained empty.

This season, the squad was led by eventual 2025 Heisman winner Fernando Mendoza. The star became Indiana's first Heisman winner before helping the program to their first National Championship.

The path they had to go through — the toughest in the country.

The program started the season against the easier out of conference opponents, winning their first three games by 133 points. Moving into Big Ten play, the Hoosiers manhandled No. 9 Illinois 63-10. This helped the team jump eight spots to sit at No. 11.

Two weeks later, they would face their toughest regular season opponent when they traveled to Oregon to play the No. 3 ranked Ducks. The game was close, but Indiana pulled away winning 30-20 to prove to fans that they were, indeed, a new program this year.

They continued dominating conference play ending with a perfect 9-0 conference record before squaring up against defending national champion No. 1 Ohio State in the Big Ten Championship. The game was low scoring, ending with a missed field goal by the Buckeyes to hand Indiana their first Big Ten title since 1967.

Next up, was the post season, where they secured the No. 1 seed before waiting almost four weeks till their matchup against No. 8 Alabama. The Tide stood no chance with Indiana cruising to a comfortable 38-3 win in the Rose Bowl. Next, a familiar foe in the Peach Bowl as No. 5 Oregon stood in their way. The Ducks defense stood no chance with Mendoza throwing for five touchdowns and only three incompletions. The Hoosiers easily cruised into the National Championship, winning 56-22.

Their final opponent, the underdog of the playoffs, No. 10 UMiami.

With the Hurricanes barely qualifying for a spot this postseason, most did not see them making it past the second round. They first had to take down No. 7 Texas A&M on the road where they snuck away with a 10-3 victory. Next up, the defending National Champions Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl. With Miami's defense coming up big with two interceptions, the Hurricanes found themselves another win closer to the title game. All they had left to do was beat Ole Miss in the Fiesta Bowl. The game was one of the best, kept close through four quarters before Miami's quarterback Carson Beck led the offense on a game winning drive, running the ball in himself for a 3-yard touchdown with just 18 seconds left.

The National Championship was another classic despite Indiana never trailing. Miami chipped away at the lead multiple times before falling behind 21-27 with under two minutes left.

Miami had one chance.

Could they have a second straight game-winning drive and secure the Championship on their home turf? They quickly made their way down the field before setting up for a 1st & 10 at Indiana's 41. Beck would drop back looking downfield for Keelan Marion, before Indiana defensive back Jamari Sharpe snatched the game-sealing interception.

The wait was finally over. Indiana won a National Championship.

The season was perfect ending with Indiana on top — now the Hoosiers wait to write the next chapter.



The Indiana Hoosiers enter the stadium at the College Football Playoff National Championship game in Miami, FL. at the Hard Rock stadium. The glow of the flame reflects onto the large crowds of Indiana fans. PHOTO BY NAME NAME, POSITION/THE DAILY CAMPUS PHOTO COURTESY OF @IUHOOSIERS ON INSTAGRAM

ALEX'S MOTORSPORTS PREVIEW:

THE IMSA SEASON OPENS WITH THE ROLEX 24

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The season opener of the 2026 International Motor Sports Association season at Daytona International Speedway will take place on Saturday, Jan. 24.

The opening race is the Rolex 24, a non-stop 24-hour race between four different race classes. The classes are Grand Touring Prototype, Le Mans Prototype 2, GT Daytona Pro and GT Daytona.

This year, some of the biggest names in motorsports will be taking the stage at Daytona. This year's Rolex 24 has attracted NASCAR's Connor Zilisch and AJ Allmendinger. IndyCar's Kyffin Simpson, Alex Palou, Scott Dixon, Jacob Abel, Christian Rasmussen, James Hinchcliffe, Will Power, Scott McLaughlin, Nolan Siegal, Marcus Ericsson and Callum Ilott will also be in attendance.

The Rolex 24 also has former Formula 1 and 2 drivers Felipe Nasr, Will Stevens, Kevin Magnussen, Fredrick Vesti, Jack Aitken, Logan Sargent, Pietro Fittapaldi, Enzo Fittapaldi, Juri Vips and Romain Grojean. Colton Herta is also racing in the Rolex 24. He switched from IndyCar to F2 for this upcoming season.

Additionally, there are some big story lines for this upcoming season.

Penske Porsche won the past two GTP manufacturers, teams and driver's championships in convincing fashion, so the question is, can they keep it up?

Their driver moves over the offseason have provided the confidence to repeat. Two-time World Endurance Championship champion Kevin Estre and one-time WEC champion and IMSA GTD and GTLM champion Laurens Vanthoor re-join IMSA full-time to an already stacked Porsche Penske No. 6 lineup with IMSA GTP and GTD Pro champion Matt Campbell.

Penske Porsches' other lineup is also strong. The No. 7 includes three-time IMSA champion Nasr, 2018 LMGTE Am Le Mans 24 Hour winner Julien Andlauer and one-time IMSA GTD Pro champion Laurin Heinrich.

Pair that with a car that was almost unbeatable last season, and it can spell trouble for the rest of the GTP teams.

McLaren will be making a return to IMSA for the first time since 2023 in a partnership with Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, so will they be competitive in a very tight GTD Pro class?

McLaren has been ingrained in sports car racing since 1995 when they came out with the F1 GTR. They also had success with their 12C GT3 and now they are returning to IMSA with the GT3 EVO.

McLaren had left IMSA following the 2023 season followingafter their 720S GT3 suffering from reliability issues and limited factory support. They came back in 2026 with a new fire in a partnership RLL Racing who has been in IMSA since 2007.

RLL Racing won the 2010 and 2011 GT classes when they partnered with BMW, so they know how to win in IMSA.

RLL Team McLaren No. 59 drivers are Max Esterson, Nikita Johnson, Juri Vips and Dean MacDonald. Those four don't have the pedigree of some of the other drivers in the GTD Pro class, but are all very talented in their own rights.

Pair that with all-around winning machines across motorsports in McLaren and RLL Racing and they certainly have a chance to win the GTE Pro class this season.

The 2026 IMSA season will be exciting, especially the Rolex 24, so make sure to tune in from Saturday Jan. 24 to Sunday Jan. 25 from 1:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

LOMBARDI LINEUP:

MID-MAJOR TEAMS AROUND THE WEEK 12 RANKINGS

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Conference play is in full swing, and while several top contenders have begun to separate themselves in the college basketball rankings, the bubble is as unpredictable and contentious as ever. That's especially the case among mid-majors, many of whom are vying for limited NCAA tournament berths in one or two-bid leagues.

This week's AP poll saw two new mid-majors cracking the field with several others hovering just outside. Here are the teams who received those votes and where they currently stand.

No. 24 Saint Louis Billikens

Saint Louis has climbed into the rankings for the first time since the 2020-21 season, riding a dominant 11-game winning streak into Atlantic 10 play. During that stretch, the Billikens picked up two rare quad one wins against Santa Clara and VCU, with even more opportunities coming up. The analytics back them up, as Saint Louis sits at No. 22 in the NET and No. 29 in the Ken Pomeroy-ratings.

Much of that success stems from their explosive offense, averaging 89.9 points per game, ranking top 10 nationally in both assists and rebounds per game. The Billikens are outscoring opponents by 20.9 points per game, displaying their utter dominance aside from a heartbreaking buzzer-beater loss to Stanford. So far, Saint Louis has taken care of business and is rightfully a top 25 team in the country.

No. 25 Miami (OH) Redhawks

No team in college hoops has sparked more debate than Miami (OH). On one hand, they're one of only three remaining undefeated teams, boasting a spotless 20-0 record. On the other, those wins include eleven quad four games and three games against Division II opponents. Unsurprisingly, the metrics are skeptical about the RedHawks, placing them at No. 49 in the NET and 90 in KenPom. In a weak MAC conference, it's likely the RedHawks won't play a single quad one game this season.

So, while the perfect record is impressive, their opponents are well below the quality of an at-large team. Regardless, the AP voters chose to reward them with a top 25 ranking.

Despite the schedule concerns, though, the RedHawks currently hold both the highest shooting efficiency and effective field goal percentage in the country. They've also proven their ability to win tight games, as proven by their back-to-back overtime victories fueled by clutch late-game shots. Regardless, Miami will need to continue to find ways to win to earn respect in March, but they have the makings of a dangerous upset candidate if they make it that far.

George Mason Patriots

Statement wins over VCU and George Washington have vaulted George Mason into the Atlantic 10's top tier. The Patriots own an impressive 17-1 record on the season, with their sole blemish coming on the road against Virginia Tech. However, much like Miami, their résumé lacks marquee wins, with ten quad four victories propping up the win column. That has limited them to No. 62 in the NET and just No. 74 in KenPom.

Defense is George Mason's specialty, holding opponents to just 67.3 points per game. While the offensive numbers aren't overwhelming, it does just enough to complement a disciplined, veteran-led team that forces nearly ten turnovers per contest. The Patriots fit the profile of many Cinderella runs in the past, including their own historic run to the final four in 2006.

Saint Mary's Gaels

Randy Bennett continues to build the growing culture at Saint Mary's, replacing all four of their departed starters with returning players rather than transfers. That continuity seems to have paid off, as the Gaels are ranked No. 32 in the NET and No. 33 in KenPom thanks to a demanding schedule. Saint Mary's boasts quality wins over teams like Virginia Tech and San Francisco, despite suffering two quad one losses against No. 15 Vanderbilt and Santa Clara and a quad two loss to Boise State.

Junior Paulius Murauskas has taken a major step as the lone returning starter, blossoming into one of the top forwards in the country with 19.3 points and 7.5 rebounds per game. The team as a whole has thrived with its strong, physical play, limiting opponents to 66.2 points per game and being one of the best rebounding teams in the nation. The Gaels are consistently a tough team to play against and are on track to secure their fifth straight March Madness appearance.

Utah State Aggies

Utah State dropped from the rankings this week after consecutive losses to Grand Canyon and UNLV, their first defeats in conference play. Even so, they remain the highest- ranked mid-major in both the NET (26) and KenPom (32), largely due to a stronger schedule in the Mountain West.

Junior Mason Falslev has been a catalyst for the Aggies' success on both ends of the floor, proving to be one of the top contributors in the Mountain West. His play has driven Utah State to rank top 30 in shooting efficiency and top 15 in steals per game. Overall, despite the rough stretch,the Aggies look to be well-positioned to rebound and remain in the at-large conversation.