

JMU NATION



'The here and now'

Cignetti has blueprint to lead JMU football to greater heights **BY CHRIS BROOKS**

Curt Cignetti's family knew that if the head football coaching job at James Madison opened, this would likely be his next leadership role. And the entire family was all in.

"Everybody [in the family] was on board with this being an exciting and good long-term move," Cignetti said. "It was pretty much a no-brainer. As soon as this position opened, I looked at my wife and said, 'We're probably going to end up there,' and we did."

On Dec. 14, 2018, Director of Athletics Jeff Bourne announced Cignetti as JMU's eighth head football coach in program history.

"JMU is probably a better football job than half of the group-of-five FBS jobs at least," Cignetti said. "At a place like JMU, there are high standards and expectations, which as a coach, you want to have the opportunity to lead a program like this one. You have a chance to win

"... as a coach, you want to have the opportunity to lead a program like this one."

— **CURT CIGNETTI,**
head football coach

the conference championship year in and year out and contend for the national championship. There are not many places like that. It was a difference-maker kind of job."

Cignetti has climbed the ladder in a stellar 36-year football coaching career that included multiple stops at Football Bowl Subdivision programs and a 67-26 career record (.720) as a head coach,

including six years at NCAA Division II's Indiana University of Pennsylvania and the past two at Elon University.

Before his arrival at Elon, the Phoenix had won just 12 games in five years, but Elon flourished under Cignetti, going 14-9 between the 2017 and 2018 seasons and qualifying for back-to-back FCS playoff appearances for the first time in school history. He was voted CAA Coach of the Year in 2017, and last season, Elon captured wins at New Hampshire and at JMU for the first time, leading to Elon's first-ever Top 5 national ranking.

"I felt like I could make a difference, just didn't know how fast," Cignetti said. "The players were extremely hungry for success. I felt good in terms of how the team responded. That first year, we won a lot of games at the end. This past year, we were beating teams decisively. We did get crippled by injuries midway through the season but made the playoffs in back-to-back years for the first time in school history."

His move to JMU was quite different than IUP and Elon in that he joined a JMU team that wasn't seeking a coach because of negativity surrounding the program. The Dukes had their best five-year stretch in school history, making the FCS playoffs in each season, including the 2016 national championship and a national runner-up showing in 2017.

"The situation here is a little different," Cignetti said. "My previous two schools were total rebuilds; this one has had recent success with great tradition. But we did take a step back last year. I thought it was important that everyone understood that we took a step back and why we took a step back. It's provided a little extra motivation for the players as they prepare for this season."

J M U N A T I O N

Since coming to Harrisonburg, Cignetti has assembled a coaching staff, secured the 2019 signing class, watched the team undergo winter workouts with Director of Strength and Conditioning Brian Phillips, and begun spring practice. There's still much to do, but for now, it's one day at a time, one rep at a time and being in the moment.

"To me it's all about controlling the controllables," Cignetti said. "What do you control? The here and now. That's all there is, and I talk to our players about it all the time. Control the things you can control and maximize the opportunities on a daily basis. That's what we're trying to do now. To me, the delicate balance will be managing this football team throughout the season so we can keep them on the field for a 16- or 17-game season. I'm excited for what we have to do right now. You have to do what you preach."

Cignetti believes there's a good culture in

place at JMU with student-athletes who have positive attitudes, like to compete and have good work ethics. However, he and his staff will work to sharpen the saw and create a finer edge within the program.



The Cignetti family gathers to share the excitement of a new coaching challenge.

"When the team is successful, everybody benefits," Cignetti said. "We want to have an identity that we're a relentless competitor, the kind of team people hate to face. We're going to take it one play at a time, treat every play like it's [0-0]."

Fast, physical, finish, be relentless and do your job. Those are key terms you'll hear when around the program, and with the proper buy-in from JMU players, there's no reason to think the Dukes can't return to Frisco, Texas, for the third time in four seasons.

And it's not about just doing it for one season. To be the best, you have to do it year in and year out.

"There should never be any self-imposed limitations anywhere you are," Cignetti said. "I think the sky is the limit. Anything is possible, but it also has to be earned and it won't be easy. We play in a tough conference and most of the teams we play in this league are capable. Can this become the No. 1 program in the country? Yes, absolutely. Will it be easy? No. Will it take time? Yes. You want to become known as the best program in the country. You're talking about doing it over multiple seasons. We're focused right now on becoming the best we can be today.

"Do we have the potential to be the best? Yes." ✪



For more on Cignetti, go to jmusports.com.

2019 SEASON TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW!

SEASON TICKET PACKAGES INCLUDE ALL SIX HOME GAMES, COMPLIMENTARY PARKING, SIGNIFICANT DISCOUNTS AND BETTER SEATING THAN SINGLE-GAME TICKETS!

<p>9/7 6 P.M. </p>	<p>9/14 3:30 P.M. </p>
<p>10/12 FAMILY WEEKEND 1:30 P.M. </p>	<p>10/26 HOMECOMING 3:30 P.M. </p>
<p>11/9 3:30 P.M. </p>	<p>11/16 3:30 P.M. </p>

JMUTICKETS.COM
(540) 568-3853
ATHLETIC-TICKET@JMU.EDU
SINGLE GAME TICKETS AVAILABLE JULY 1ST

RASHAD ROBINSON

IMPROVE YOUR GAMEDAY PARKING!
MAKE A GIFT TO THE PROUD AND TRUE FUND TO SUPPORT JMU STUDENT-ATHLETE SCHOLARSHIPS AND GENERAL OPERATING BUDGET AND RECEIVE IMPROVED FOOTBALL GAMEDAY PARKING AND OTHER MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

SUPPORTING JMU STUDENT ATHLETES