

2022-23 Mississippi State Postgame Quotes

Mississippi State vs. No. 25 Texas A&M – February 25, 2023

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: Andre Gordon hit that three to put them up 44-35, and you called a timeout. From that point on, you guys responded with a 12-2 run. What was said in the huddle during that timeout?

CJ: “It was just time to regroup. We talked at halftime that they weren’t going to go anywhere. There’s a reason they are 13-2 in the SEC and had won six in a row. They’re a tough-minded group, have got a great culture and they play the right way.”

“We didn’t get out of the second half very well. I’m not sure why, but we didn’t. So, it was time to regroup. They responded, especially defensively. We got a bunch of stops in a row and got in transition a little bit. Once that happened, the crowd was huge. They played a vital role in our comeback and for us to win that game. If we’re on the road like that and the other team’s crowd is into the game, and they come out of the halftime break and do that, I’m not sure at this point if you can win that game. I’m thankful for The Hump, and the people that showed up to will us back into the game.”

Q: What has it been like for you to watch your guys grow up in those situations in real time?

CJ: “It’s been fun. It’s rewarding. We had plenty of close games earlier and we’re on the correct side of the ledger when the buzzer went off. Like anything in life, you can’t teach experience. For whatever reason, our group had to go through some tough experiences to learn and grow. They did that. We talked about that time when we handled it and got to the other side. Certainly, it makes you feel good about doing what you do. They responded like that and stuck to the process. Now, they’re being rewarded for it.”

Q: What has it been like to see Shawn Jones Jr. grow into his new role and these minutes?

CJ: “He looks like a vet now. He looks like he belongs out there, and he’s got so many natural instincts. I can’t take much credit for how he’s playing right now. He’s so long and rangy. He’s got a feel for what’s going on. He’s got some anticipation of getting his hands on balls. Certainly, his wingspan and length help him do that. He’s getting more comfortable on the offensive end and finding his spots. He’s got a lot of confidence. Against Missouri, he jumped up with a 1:42 and jacked up a three that maybe was a little bit early. He believed in himself and shot it. That’s always a good thing when they have confidence in themselves.”

Q: Cameron Matthews is shooting 83 percent from the free throw line this month. How have you seen him develop from being a glue guy to someone you really trust late in game situations?

CJ: “I’m not sure I trust him if he tries to throw another alley-oop to Tolu. I almost lost my mind. I love Cameron Matthews. We’ve already had a discussion about it in the training room. I was a little worried when he did that. Then, he got fouled. Maybe his confidence would’ve been a little shook. When that first ball went in, I felt really good about him being at the line. He’s become a guy that isn’t just a defender and rebounder. He’s facilitating the break. He’s a guy that we run stuff for late game to ensure that he gets fouled. He does have a lot of confidence in himself. Obviously, his teammates do as well because they’re finding him. Everybody knows when you got a guy or two that can knock down free throws late that it makes everybody feel better.”

Q: You had a stretch where you lost 7-of-8. Now you're in a stretch where you've won 7-of-9. Obviously, you've been a lot more efficient offensively in that strength. Beyond that, is there an overriding factor that's made your team better during that stretch?"

CJ: "Not smart enough to figure all that out, but I do know it's a lot more fun to win 7-of-9 than the first part of that question. I was proud of my team then; we had plenty of fight in us and came out on the short end of the stick. We kept staying together and kept working. They're reaping the dividends of it now. I said it once, I'm going to repeat it. I just don't know if we win this game if we don't have that kind of crowd. I don't know if we win this game if they don't get into the game the way they did and almost will us to get out in front and make the other team call timeouts. I don't think you can place as much significance on that as how valuable it was."

Q: We talked about Shawn Jones Jr. already, and we've talked about Eric Reed Jr. getting a shot in the first half and scoring some. Talk about how on any given night any of these guys can step up for you.

CJ: "Yeah, it's kind of been part of our equation. Just different guys are stepping up and not necessarily always in the scoring department. I thought Will McNair Jr. gave us some really good minutes. He was so vocal on the bench. He helps all of us. I mean he really sees the game so well. Things you guys wouldn't understand unless you were down on the bench or at our shootarounds."

"Eric Reed Jr. has become a guy down the stretch that we sub for to get him on the floor to play defense or in this case tonight to play offense down the stretch when Shak [Shakeel Moore] was in foul trouble. If you're going to end up having a good season, you need guys to step up in different nights."

Mississippi State Forward Tolu Smith and Guard Shawn Jones Jr.

Q: Tolu, you guys held them to one field goal in the last 14 minutes of the second half, take us through that defensively. What were you guys doing there?

TS: "We were just sitting down and guarding. We had a lot of guys locking in with the mindset that we had to defend. Guys like Shawn [Jones Jr.] did a great job on the ball and off the ball. All the guys [did]. I'm proud of everybody."

Q: To follow up on that, you guys go into that timeout down 9 around the 10-minute mark. What was the huddle and what was said to spark the 12-2 run you went on right after that?

TS: "I think everybody knows the mindset that we fight for our lives. Our back against the wall, we're trying to get to the tournament. We just had to pick it up a notch. We came out flat, but we had to bounce back and we did."

Q: Shawn, that two-handed dunk on the fast break, you seemed a little amped up after that. Tell me, what was that emotion like?

SJJ: "We were catching back up. We started finding our groove. That happened in the moment of finding our groove, and that gave us energy all around so we can play hard."

Q: Tolu, Coach Jans says that he doesn't talk to you guys too much about the NCAA Tournament. Do you guys follow that as players individually?

TS: "I talk about it all the time. It's my last year, I'm trying to go out with a bang. I think about it a lot. I try to not talk about it before the game, but it's hard not to."

Q: You guys had a stretch where you had a dunk and layup in transition. How much has this team bought into that mentality of knowing that when the defense is working, the offense is going to come?

SJJ: "We mainly focus ourselves on defense. So, we know when we play defense, the offense will come. If you can stop somebody from scoring, you don't have to score worry about going down and scoring every time as long as you play defense."

Q: Tolu, let me take you back to the Florida game. Coach has you on the bench in the final minutes of that game and Will McNair Jr. finished up. Since then, you've been on a tear. Take us through that moment, and how you've responded?

TS: "That game I was just like, 'whatever it takes to win'. I feel like in any game it's 'whatever it takes to win'. Whether I'm on the bench, cheering my teammates on or on the court producing. I don't know if it was that, but I think that did help me a little bit – [it] put a little motor in my back."

Q: Tolu, just talk about this team. At any time, somebody else different steps up, just talk about how fun it is to see your teammates do their thing up there."

TS: "It's a great feeling. It's a great feeling to see the work being put out. I see everybody put the work in every day. This guy right here [Shawn Jones Jr.] puts a lot of work, and it's converting. Keep working, and it's going to show."

Q: "For both you guys, Coach Jans was obviously pretty pumped up himself, getting really emotional on the sidelines. What's it like for you guys to see all his hard work pay off as well and see the fans rally in a bit?"

SJ: "[Coach] Jans is going to bring the energy when it's time. He is going to keep us in line and also bring the energy. We know that if we play hard then we're going to get the side we want from him, the positive side, the excitement from him. And that's what we play for, to see him happy."

Q: Tolu, you said you keep up with quad one, and where you are in the bracketology scheme of things. Does that give you a boost going into a game like today?

TS: "Yes, I definitely have the same mindset in every game. Just this one had a little more umph to it. Even the next one, which is Senior Night. I just hope that everybody comes out and supports. We need everybody, all the fans to come out. It's my last game at home, so I would love for everybody to show their face."

Texas A&M Head Coach Buzz Williams

Q: You went up 44-35 and then only made one field goal after that. Were they doing something defensively?

BW: "I think he was mixing up their defense a little bit. I'm not exactly sure what the numbers would be in that stretch. I think the only field goal we scored, after Dre [Andre Gordon] hit the three, was on that air ball put back which was Henry's [Coleman III] only offensive rebound. I think in that stretch we only scored free throws until the very end."

"I think their defense is third in the country, and they're second in the SEC in creating turnovers. I think that's a big portion of what hurt us. Our turnover rate was too high. Now, a team who is so dominant defensively, is playing on a broken floor offensively. The thing that hurt us was many of those turnovers were a live ball and a byproduct is, we don't have chance to offensive rebound. We don't have a chance to get fouled, much less make the shot. So, there's a compound impact to playing with such a high turnover rate, but that is part of what they're good at."

“Number one at defending the rim, [they’re] number three in our league. Number two at making turnovers. I think that’s why nationally they are ranked so high defensively. I think that’s who coach is regardless of where he’s been employed.”

Q: Your thoughts on Cameron Matthews’s athleticism.

BW: “He’s a First-Team All-SEC type athlete. That was our scouting report on him. I know a lot of these players were here with Coach Howland, and I know number one [Tolu Smith] was fantastic. He was a First-Team All-SEC player. I don’t think number four [Matthews] will be voted first team, but maybe you guys should create a First-Team All-SEC who looks like an athlete and is built like an athlete. He plays like an athlete, a multiple sport looking athlete.”

“When I watch him play, he just plays with such a great motor, and I think he is comfortable in who he is. I don’t think he tries to do something he’s not supposed to do, but I don’t think he does anything that he knows he can’t do. So, his effectiveness, he’s just answering the bell over and over on both ends on the floor. Number one [Smith] is deserving of all the praise, number three [Moore] is deserving and number 10 [Davis] is deserving, but I think Matthews is, I don’t know if glue is right because that seems to kind of limit the impact he has on the game, but his leverage when he’s on the floor is very good.”

Q: I thought Anderson Garcia gave you some good minutes. What are your thoughts on his performance?

BW: “I was surprised that they booed him. That’s not to be critical of the fans; he is a beautiful human being. In the seven months that I have been around him, I have become a huge fan of his spirit. I love the way he competes in an ego-less way. He is for the team, and I thought he played really well. His foul rate was too high, we would have played him more if he wouldn’t have fouled out.”

Q: What are your thoughts on how Coach Jans has gotten the team and the fans to buy in?

BW: “If you study his whole career: the little town he’s from in Iowa, what he did at the junior college in Iowa, what he did at Chipola in Florida, the rise at Wichita State in both tenures he was there, the job that he did at Bowling Green and the job that he did at New Mexico State. Obviously, I’ve known Coach [John] Cohen for a long time since I was an assistant at Northwestern State, and he was the baseball coach.”

“Coach [Jans] is a ball coach. Regardless of where he’s been employed, he’s had a lot of hard jobs, and he’s always been successful. I think this is his 7th Division One season as a head coach, and he’s won close to 75 percent of his games. That means that he was the head coach in junior college for 7 seasons, and he won 75 percent of his games. No matter where he’s employed, whether they have a bunch of scholarships, don’t have scholarships, you’ve heard of the school, it has a hyphen in the school, which league was it in, which league is it going to go in, is there NIL, is there not. In between the lines, he figures out how to give his team the best chance to win.”

“I don’t know what he’s doing to get the community support at the rate that they are. I think Starkville is a college town, that appreciates the entertainment done in a fundamental, blue-collar way. You can see the evolution of the priority of how he wants to play, and what he thinks gives them their best chance.”