

2022-23 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes
Mississippi State vs. Florida – March 9, 2023
SEC Tournament – 2nd Round

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: Opening Statement

CJ: “Loved the way we started the ballgame. Got off to a good start on both ends of the floor. We were in a great rhythm offensively. Then, we weren’t. We didn’t end the half great, had a pretty sizeable lead. Then, came out in the second half, they started better than we did. The whole second half was a struggle for us, especially on the offensive end. We scored 21 points [in the second half], scored 12 [points] in five minutes in the overtime and 21 in the 20. That wasn’t ideal. At the end of the day when you’re in these situations, it’s find a way – survive and advance. That’s what we did.”

Q: What are your thoughts on tomorrow’s round three with Alabama?

CJ: “I’d like to enjoy this for a little bit, but that’s not the way it works. It’s tournament play. I just look at it as a wonderful opportunity. I don’t know where they’re ranked, top 5, a No. 1 seed. They got great players, great coaches. We haven’t been able to beat them. We had two cracks at it. What an opportunity. Obviously, a big challenge for us.”

Q: Where do you think your team has changed or grown the most since the last time you played Alabama in January?

CJ: “We’ll find out tomorrow, I guess. I would have liked to have said offensively. But, coming off that performance especially in the second half, it wouldn’t feel right coming out of my mouth. We just struggled, a lot of that had to do with Florida. They just stuck with it, spread us out on the other end. We just struggled. We got out of rhythm. We didn’t make a three in the second half. We struggled from the free-throw line.”

“In the end, we just had to gut one out. I think this group has earned some toughness. They’ve come from behind. They’ve staved off other teams that way. I just think their makeup right now is probably a little bit better than it was then.”

Q: When I saw you in the spring, you weren’t sure what you had. How did the process come together of having a good and possibly NCAA tournament team?

CJ: “Yeah, we just talked about that. That’s what I talked in the locker room about our team, about what a hodgepodge group of people we put together. We’ve had some ups and downs, which is normal for a new coach, new staff, especially in the landscape of college basketball. It’s obviously becoming more normal. But, when you’re new, there’s a lot of things to sort out.”

“We got off to that great start in the non-league, had some confidence. Then, some adversity hit when we got into SEC play. Locally, in all my press conferences, I talked about the fact that I don’t remember being as proud of a group sticking together, weathers the storm, continuing to practice at a high level, not giving up and not throwing the towel in. That’s the reason I think we’ve had success is because of that time when we were struggling in the win column, we are so close. They kept grinding, kept with it and kept believing. They didn’t start questioning each other or us. That’s probably what I’m proud of most.”

Q: Talk about Tolu Smith and his impact on the team.

CJ: “Yeah, it’s a luxury to have him. In the fall I said, I think at the SEC preseason event in Birmingham, that we wanted to have a year that we all want to have. He had to be an All-SEC First-Team player, and he was. He delivered.”

"Every night, he knows he's going to get double-teams. People are going to come at him. He's obviously not a great free throw shooter. Why not foul him a little bit more and make the referees call it or not, but he plays through it. He plays through it. His free throws have been up-and-down all year long. I think everybody in the gym knows when we walk out, we're going to play inside-out through Tolu. He's handled it wonderfully all year long."

Q: You talked about finding a way to win. Things got ugly tonight, but your team found your way. What happened in overtime especially?

CJ: "Yeah, I'll get a ton of texts this afternoon. We'll take it any way we can get it. That was ugly but we'll take it. I chuckle a little bit internally because that's how college basketball is for the most part. Most games aren't that aesthetically pleasing. What they show on the highlights for the fans, everybody getting a snippet of what goes on. That's not reality most of the time, especially in a conference tournament situation when you try to survive and advance. We've won a lot of ugly games different places we've been. Won those in that nature this year, doesn't bother this crew at all."

Q: Obviously, tomorrow is going to be pretty physical. What do you plan at throwing at Alabama to get the win tomorrow?

CJ: "Not even close to being able to answer that question. I've been all-in on Florida. I haven't watched a minute of Alabama. Certainly, my staff is ahead of the game. I'm excited to catch up. That's what I said to the SEC folks, that I can't wait to open the laptop and get back into that grind of trying to prepare a team. [It's] A 24-hour turnaround, we obviously got veterans on our staff. They get it. Like everybody in this tournament, they get how to turn it around and prepare. I know we're going to have to play really, really well."

Guard Dashawn Davis and Forward Tolu Smith

Q: "Tolu, congratulations on the win. Obviously, pretty happy. Talk about getting the ball at the close of the second."

TS: "Honestly, man, I thought Dashawn was going to lay it up. At the last minute, he passed it to me. I thought it was a great play on his part. I thought it was a great play."

Q: "You're going to play No. 1 seed Alabama tomorrow. What kind of gives you confidence going into the matchup tomorrow?"

TS: "Yeah, I just feel like we gave them a good run both times. We made a couple mistakes in both games. I feel like we worked on and got better at. I think we're going to give them a good run tomorrow and get the win."

DD: "Like he said, I feel like we played them good both times. We made crucial mistakes last time, a couple bad calls, but we definitely are ready to play them again."

Q: "Dashawn, how did you draw up the final play? Was the intent to give it to Tolu?"

DD: "No, it wasn't drawn up. It was me playing instinct. The guy stepped up. I saw Tolu was open. So, I just gave it to him."

Q: "Can you talk about the impact the Mississippi State faithful had out there?"

DD: "The fans always give us great support, home and away. We definitely needed that."

TS: "Oh yeah, the State fans did a great job. I heard them from the start at tip to the end of the game. We love they come all the way out here to support us."

Florida Head Coach Todd Golden

Q: Opening Statement

TG: "Yeah, obviously a tough loss today for us. But with that being said, I was really proud of the way our guys continued to battle. Obviously, didn't get off to a great start. Down 14, six and a half minutes to go in the first half. Obviously, that could have gone one of two ways. We got that thing back to having a three-point lead with 13 minutes to go in the second half. Thought we did a great job of finding our stride, especially on the offensive end, during that segment."

"Two chances at the end of regulation. Then, overtime to win that game. Came up a little short. Considering what we've gone through in terms of Colin's [Castleton] injury, having to reinvent ourselves later in the season. Incredibly proud of the strides these guys have made, the rest of our team getting back to this level where we're competitive."

"Mississippi State, an important game for them to get to the NCAA Tournament today. I thought we did a great job of doing everything we could to be the spoilers. I know our guys can hold their heads high after that effort today."

Q: What were the options on the last play?

TG: "Yeah, obviously wanted to get the ball in the front court as fast as we could. Applied a little bit of that pressure. We couldn't get a catch with the run. I thought Loft [Kyle Lofton] made a good play getting it right back to M.J. [Myreon Jones] with a little bit of steam. Would have liked to get a little deeper penetration, then a pass."

"With four seconds, the message is you got either two dribbles and one pass or three dribbles and a shot. Then, you got to get that thing up. You would like a higher percentage shot only being down one, but you have to get one up, period. Got to live with it a little bit. Obviously, to try to get deeper paint, too, in that situation. At the end of the day, we got two of those up. You hope one of them falls to find a way to win that game."

Q: Talking about sort of the latter half of the first half and the second half, talk about the adjustments your team made defensively.

TG: "Yeah, I thought we did a really good job of limiting second chances in that stretch. I think they only had one offensive rebound the first 10 minutes of the second half. That's the whole deal against these guys. We were confident that we'd be able to have a pretty good first-shot defense against Mississippi State. But their talent is on the glass, their athleticism, physicality, strength. Obviously, we got out-rebounded by nine on the offensive glass."

"We talked about it at halftime. We were down seven in terms of offensive rebounds. We were down 10, so that's seven points, basically. We told our guys if we could kind of limit their opportunities the second half, cut it down to two or three second chances, we would give ourselves a chance to win. We certainly did that. We needed one or two more defensive rebounds to finish that job. That's really where the difference was. We held them under 40 percent all game. Sent them to the line a little too much. Our defense and first shot was good. Again, we got beat up on the boards a little bit."

Q: Would your team accept a NIT bid if offered?

TG: "Yeah, absolutely. Any time you get an opportunity to compete, you better step up and grab it. As long as I'm the head coach at Florida, we'll compete. We're excited to see. I think we have a great shot to make it. Getting to 16 wins, having a top 10 strength of schedule in the country, wins against Tennessee, wins on the road against Mississippi State, at home against Missouri."

"We have a lot of things we can hang our hat on. We were trending to be a tournament team prior to Colin's injury. We'll be prepared for whatever happens on Sunday."

Q: I know you're still trying to process, but looking at the season as a whole, where do you feel your team has grown the most?

TG: "I think we've become as a program a lot more competitive. We weren't very good at it early in the year. Thought we had moments where we didn't push through, do a great job that way. But over the course of the back half of December into our conference schedule, I thought we did a fantastic job that way. Obviously took us a little bit to get over Colin's injury, figure ourselves out. We had a game or two where we weren't in a tight one late."

"Other than that, you look at any game we had on our schedule in conference play, I thought we were in it to the wire. In most of those games we had a big deficit, we did a good job rallying back and finding a way to compete. I thought today was a great example of that as well. That level and understanding, what it takes to keep yourself on the floor in our program. In our program, you got to compete regardless of the results and be consistent that way. I thought our guys have done a really good job of growing that way over the course of the year."

Q: Just to build on you talking about how your team has grown. Myreon hit the last nine points to send the game into overtime. Talk about how he's grown throughout the season.

TG: "Yeah, he's done a good job, man. Our issue early on is we had a lot of guys that were beating each other out on any given day. Hard to separate. We had injuries with Will and Kyle early. Took us a little bit to figure out a rhythm. Myreon wasn't really in there this aggressively early on."

"Once we got into conference, we felt like his leadership. The fact that he's been through it before, along with his skill, his ability to make a shot, make a pass, would really help us. Him and Kyle have done a really good job anchoring that backcourt for us over the course of the year. So, again, he was huge for us in that Georgia win last weekend, 12 rebounds. He's done a really good job of doing 'the little things' to help us win. That's what you expect from a fifth-year senior."

Florida Guard Riley Kugel and Guard Kowacie Reeves

Q: Riley, you struggled a little bit shooting for the night. What were you able to do to stay with the system and keep making an impact?

RK: "Yeah, like you said, I had a rough start shooting the ball. Taurean Green, he picked me up. He told me all about my game is scoring. I can facilitate, make plays for others. He said, let the game come to you. I got full faith in all my teammates. I really just started facilitating."

Q: What were the challenges with trying to deal with a guy like Tolu Smith in the low post when you guys are undermanned?

RK: "Yeah, I've been knowing Tolu in the past. Tolu is a great player. We knew we had to put a body on him. Our post guys, they fought hard. The guards had a rotational block out. I just feel like the key was not letting him get deep paint touches. He kind of got that, that's really it."

KR: "Yeah, I think that we just made it tough on him. He finished the game well, but I think our guys fought. Like all our bigs got in there and made him earn it. At the free-throw line, we made him make a lot of free throws. You got to tip your hat. They've got a lot of good players."