

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes

Mississippi State vs. Furman – December 17th, 2021

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement

BH: "That was obviously a barnburner and an unbelievable game. I thought that we played some of the best defense that we had played all season in the first 10 minutes of the game. That really got us going on the fast break and allowed us to get the ball inside and build a 17-point lead. I thought that Andersson Garcia was particularly awesome down that stretch to help us build that lead."

"They made a really nice comeback when they cut it down to 11 points. Then, [Alex] Hunter started knocking down three's. Boy, can he shoot, we knew that coming into the game. He was shooting 48 percent on three-pointers on the season and was 77 percent tonight."

"In the second half, I don't think that we were as efficient offensively as we were in the first half, primarily because we were unable to get stops defensively and could not score in transition. In fast break, we had four points in the game which is not enough. At one point in the second half going into the last TV timeout, they were shooting 71 percent for the half."

"We knew how tough this was going to be. I have great respect for their program and their coach. They beat Louisville, and we knew that going into our game against Louisville going into The Bahamas. They are picked to win their league and that team will be in the tournament. They can shoot and space the floor very well. I should have my head examined for scheduling teams like that. This was a really good win over a very good team."

"I thought that late in the game that the two moves late in the game by two guys who are both from Olive Branch, Mississippi that helped us win. One was moving D.J. Jeffries to guard number 10, Alex Hunter. We should have done that way earlier because he did not score the rest of the game. D.J. was face guarding Hunter and not giving him any room to breathe. The second was Cam Matthews getting some big steals in the last four minutes of the game. His defense, leadership, and toughness really impacted the outcome of this game. Give those guys huge credit."

Q: Were you holding your breath on the last few Furman three-pointers that they had late in the game?

BH: "It was more than that, I think that my heart stopped. When your heart stops, I think that you know it is pretty serious. They were wide open. I'm very thankful for the man in Heaven that they both were errant shots because they were both by really good shooters, especially the one in the deep corner. I'm stunned. I don't know how that happened. I'm going to have to check that out on film. Thank goodness. I'm just really, really thankful. When the last one left his hands, I was sure that it was going in."

Q: How did you change up your defense down the stretch?

BH: "We started switching ball-screens more and put D.J. Jeffries on Alex Hunter late. We should have done that a lot earlier. One of my assistants [Ernie Zeigler] suggested that, and I'm glad that he told me to do that."

Q: What can you say about how much of an impact that Cam Matthews has when he is on the floor?

BH: "Cam is a Mississippi State guy. He's a great teammate and kid. Cam has excellent toughness, and I'm incredibly proud of him for what he showed us tonight. We don't win the game without Cameron Matthews in the last five minutes tonight."

Q: How do you think winning close games will benefit the team moving forward?

BH: "I believe in this team. I believe that we're going to win close games. In the Minnesota game, we were down 14-0 at the beginning of the game. Then, I should have been more liberal substituting in the Colorado State game. I think that we got tired down the stretch. I think that a big part for us is just using our bench. I thought that Javian Davis got some good minutes tonight especially in the first half. Shakeel Moore had a big game tonight with 12 points. Cam Carter played some good minutes tonight as well. We're going to try and get D.J. Jeffries out there for some more minutes. D.J. [Jeffries] can really guard the two-guard like he did tonight."

Forward Garrison Brooks

Q: What changed, defensively, in the match-ups in the last minutes?

GB: "Just having Cameron Matthews out there. I think he is a huge difference maker on our team, and it showed. Having him on the court is one of the best things we can have late in the games and anytime we need to stop."

Q: What was the energy level when he [Cameron Matthews] makes those plays towards the end?

GB: "It really fuels our team especially because he is a high energy guy. It's something that he does every day in practice, and it's something he does every game. I think he sees plays before they happen. He's able to stop, get steals and disrupt the offense."

Q: Did it take you by surprise when Furman's Alex Hunter came out tonight shooting three's like he did?

GB: "He's a really good shooter. We knew he was going to come into the game with his shooting, but it's no surprise."

Q: What opened things up during the first half?

GB: "Just us being ourselves, making some transition buckets and us being patient on the offensive end."

Q: Did the defense allow you to have those transition plays?

GB: "Definitely, you have to get stops to get a good transition. So, that's essentially how we do it. Just get stops, run to the corners and just being athletic in transition is great for us."

Q: You have some key guys out, but you still get the job done. What does that mean to this team?

GB: "Right, it's tough without those guys [Tolu Smith and Rocket Watts]. I can't wait until they get back. They're really key guys to our team. Once they come back, we will be full strength and probably will not have guys play so many minutes, but it will be a great thing to have those two guys back."

Forward DJ Jeffries

Q: What fueled you guys late in that second half?

DJJ: “Just getting back to what we did the first 10 minutes of the game. Coach Howland wanted us to get stops again. So, we just started putting stops together. We started stopping those guys: they came out in the second half hot – I think they shot 71-percent from the field in the second half. [We] just came in and bought in on defense. We just grinded, toughened it out and we ended up getting the win.”

Q: What goes into getting stops, whether in the first 10 minutes or the last 10 minutes of the game?

DJ: “The game is on the line at that point. So, we had to pick up our intensity [and] get some extra stops. Number 10 [Alex Hunter], he came out hot in the second half. So, Coach [Howland] told me to get on him. I kind of just took him out of their offense. Everybody else, we just picked up our defense, played hard and finished the game. We didn’t want to lose at home. This would’ve been a bad loss for us. So, you want the win. We just fought and put it together.”

Q: How much did Cameron Matthew’s performance on the defensive end fuel you guys?

DJ: “Cam is, what Coach [Howland] says, our best defender. He’s a teammate of mine, so I know what he can do defensively. He’s just one of those guys that brings energy and toughness. You want to win, you know? So him coming in there with two major steals, dunking one of them, it brought the energy we needed and helped us pull off this win.”

Q: What is it like to see a guy like him play through injuries and make some plays?

DJ: “Cam, he’s a tough guy. He’s been that way his whole life. He brought his energy. He came in and made big plays like he always does. He’s one of the toughest guys I know. He helped us out major those last couple of minutes. I’m just proud of him, because it’s hard playing through injuries, and he showed his toughness tonight.”

Q: Where have you seen you guys grow these last couple of games and what’s the ceiling?

DJ: “I would say we’ve grown defensively. The last couple of games, we’ve been taking more pride in defense. We’ve been actually locking down and fighting things out. The Colorado State game came down to a couple of possessions, and they just happened to be the better team that night. We just learn how to play defensively and how to play with each other. We grow each and every day. It’s still early, so we have plenty of time to get it all together. I’m pretty sure we’ll get better as the season continues on.”

Q: How does it feel to keep this from getting out of control and win it late?

DJ: “We didn’t want to drop this one at home. This was a tough one, and Coach [Howland] keeps preaching to us about getting to the NCAA Tournament. We’re just trying to fight to get to the tournament. It’s everybody’s dream; we’re all buying in and fighting to get there, because who doesn’t want to go to March Madness? It’s always been a dream of mine, and I’m pretty sure it’s a dream of everybody else’s. I’m trying to get there and everyone else is trying to get there. We’re just trying to fight and put it together and keep growing and building each and every day.”