

## **2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes**

### **Mississippi State vs. Lamar – December 2, 2021**

#### **Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland**

##### ***Opening Statement***

**BH:** "I'm really happy with the fact that we won tonight against a team that was very hungry to get a win. You can see they're very well-coached. Coach Brooks does a great job. I thought the first half we got off to a great start, but we made a couple of mistakes to let them cut the lead on two three's from No. 13 [Davion Buster]. That's where we have to do a better job defensively. They shot 46-percent in the first half from the field and 40-percent from three. We shot 52-percent and 40-percent from three, but were only up by eight."

"In the second half, we did a better job of locking them down where they only shot 40-percent from the field in the second half and 22-percent from the three. I was really pleased about JD [Javian Davis] knocking down his free throws. He's been working very hard, very happy for him on that. I thought he did a great job on defense in terms of all the ball-screens they were running. He was outstanding to stay in front of the ball."

"I thought that Rocket [Watts] gave us a huge lift tonight. Rocket had his best game as a Bulldog this far, and I think you're seeing glimpses of how he's going to be able to help us. He took all good shots, was very efficient. He scored 15 points in 14 minutes, I thought that was great. And I thought Tolu [Smith]'s second half was really good. He had 14 [points] and 11 [rebounds] after having donuts [zero points, zero rebounds] in the first half. He really got it going on the offensive glass, where he led the SEC last year in offensive rebounding."

##### ***Q: What was the difference between the first and second half for Tolu [Smith]?***

**BH:** "My whole thing was to get him to play harder defensively and not worry about the offense, because he gave up a couple of shots to No. 35 [Clayton Carpenter] where they weren't contested well enough. Then, to also focus on rebounding. I never thought I would ever say at the end of a half that he had zero rebounds. So, I'm like, 'You've got to rebound, are you kidding me? You led the SEC in rebounding last year.' So, I was trying to be a little encouraging."

##### ***Q: Rocket said he looked more comfortable and a lot of that was the confidence he was feeling tonight, what did you see from him?***

**BH:** "I just thought he played really well all the way around. He made a few defensive mistakes, [but] everybody does. He really gives this calming effect. He knows how to play. He was very good out there in terms of directing things. He let everything come to him, nothing was forced ... That being said, he's learning our system. It's a new system after being in one for two years, and I'm really pleased with how he played tonight. I'm so happy for him and so happy for our team because to have that kind of play, being able to give us a charge off the bench is going to be huge for us right now."

##### ***Q: How well has Iverson [Molinar] been playing in the role you've given him?***

**BH:** "I think he's doing a great job. I've been giving him a lot of minutes, but it starts with his defense. He was the best guy guarding No. 20 [C.J. Roberts] tonight. He was the only guy that really did a good job staying in front of Roberts, who had 25 on us. He's really improved so much from a defensive standpoint over his career. Three assists and zero turnovers made for an excellent job there. He knocked down 3-for-7 from threes and has been really working on that. We shot well from three tonight as a team. His overall floor game was great. I'm really excited about it too, because he's leading, he's running the team."

## **Forward Tolu Smith**

***Q: As you're learning this five position this year, how's that adjustment been, specifically on defense just with what you're trying to do, how comfortable are you in that spot?***

**TS:** "I'm getting there. I feel like it's a difficult position. It's not easy. It's not for everybody, but I'm open and willing to take the task. Coach Howland still gets on me and criticizes me for things I need to work on. It's different when you have one of the best defensive players in the SEC, Abdul Ado, as a friend. I tend to call him or text him to see what I'm supposed to do in certain spots. I'm just trying to figure the in's and out's of being a great interior defender. So, it's just a learning experience trying to adjust to the new role."

***Q: Rocket had his best game as a Bulldog, what did it mean to see him get into a little bit of a rhythm tonight with 15 points?***

**TS:** "It's a great feeling to see a player that's going through injuries just like me have a great game and a great start to the season. Rocket's been putting a lot of work in. He's a phenomenal shooter, a phenomenal teammate and a phenomenal player overall. I feel like overall our team just loves that experience for him. It was great, I feel like a lot of players did good. JD [Javian Davis] played great, and I feel like Shakeel played well. So, it was just good to see players thriving in their roles."

***Q: Looking at the halftime stats, you came out in the second half completely different half. What did you really tell yourself there at half and have a double-double in that half alone?***

**TS:** "To be honest, that was probably the worst half I've ever had at Mississippi State, I just felt like mentally I wasn't there, and I had to pick it up. Coach got on me and was just telling me "Hey you've got to pick this up, we're not playing how we want to play." I had to get down to getting dirty which is how I usually play. I want to thank my coaching staff and my teammates for pushing me to be hard."

## **Guard Rocket Watts**

***Q: Take us through how this process since June has been like for you, just coming to a new school and immediately having to recover from surgery.***

**RW:** "It's been a long process with my hip. I just kept trusting the process and going day-by-day with [athletic trainer] Seth [Tisdale]. I appreciate him. I appreciate my teammates for keeping my head on straight and talking to me through my ups and downs. I'm just very blessed."

***Q: What does it mean for this team right now that you and Tolu are back healthy?***

**RW:** "It means a lot. Coach [Howland] kept telling Tolu and I that we play a big role in this team. I feel like we do. We've just got to keep coming in and getting treatment every day and to just keep grinding. If we do that, it will be a great year for us."

***Q: Just from a mental side of things, how was it for you when you first arrived and then you learned that you needed to have surgery?***

**RW:** "I'd say from a mental standpoint it messed with me a little bit. I had come in and played a couple of good weeks. So, that shook me a little bit. When Coach [Howland] told me I had to have surgery and that I'd be out three-to-five months, my teammates rallied around me. I can't thank them enough."

**Lamar Head Coach Alvin Brooks**

***Q: You put up a really good fight, but did not have enough to overcome an early deficit against a good SEC team.***

**AB:** "We did not. We played a really good SEC team, the biggest team we've played. They're a really physically imposing team, and they pound it everywhere on the glass. We wanted minus-seven on the glass in the first half. They only turned over three times. I was really proud of our effort there. We've got to be able to sustain it."

"We were down some guys, but our spirit has been good. Our freshmen, five men, played. Clayton Carpenter, Deiman Reyes and Valentin Catt were playing against an SEC group. I thought they did a pretty good job in the first half, but they're freshmen. That's encouraging. I thought our guards did a pretty good job controlling the tempo of the game. We've just got to keep battling. We're close to putting it together. I thought we turned them over when we needed to late. There was a stretch in the second half that kind of got away from us. I thought they started going inside, and they were able to out rebound us. That was the difference of the game."

***Q: Talk about rebounding...***

**AB:** "It was 18-11 at the half, so minus-seven. The second half, they were plus-13 on us so 20 overall. We're not a really big team, so we need our fives and fours to do a great job. Mason Senigaur and Lincoln Smith combined for six rebounds each, so a total of 12 rebounds for my four position. That's fantastic."

"Overall, I thought we did a good job of taking care of the ball. We only had three turnovers at the half. We had seven total for the game which gave us a chance to win on the road. Defensively, I thought we scrapped and played hard. We've just got to correct the rebounding deficit."