

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes

Mississippi State at LSU – Saturday, February 12, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement:

BH: "I thought that we started out the game really well. I was very happy with our defense getting us out to a 7-0 start. We really lost control of the game about four minutes into the first half. We had way too many turnovers, including 11 in the first half, which is way too many. We got sped up by the press a little bit. Rocket [Watts] threw one away trying to throw one to Javian Davis 40 feet in the air. They gave the turnover to J.D., but that was Rocket's turnover. We've just got to do a better job handling our possessions."

"We worked a lot on our press offense, and I think in the second half we did a much better job handling both the ball and the pressure. I thought [Tari] Eason really hurt us in the first half. He hit two three-pointers in a row. We knew he could make those shots if he was left open, and he did. I thought we did a much better job defensively in the second half. We fought our way back to hold a 48-45 lead, but we have to shoot the ball better."

"[Going] 3-for-17 from three-point range is not going to get the job done on the road. We also have to knock down our foul shots. Iverson [Molinar] was 10-of-10, but the rest of the team was 10-of-18. We had a key spot where we were down one and missed two free throws in a row after a really nice pass. You just can't make those kinds of mistakes in a road game. They scored 20 points off our turnovers. That was the biggest difference in the game."

Q: How do you feel your team did late in this game? How do you account for the increased offensive execution in the second half?

BH: "I thought we got hurt with our defensive execution in the second half. [Xavier] Pinson hurt us a couple of times on easy baskets where he was driving, and we were supposed to switch. We came off a good three-point shooter, Eason, who made a big one in the corner for them, you can't leave when the ball is on your side of the floor. We can't afford to have those kinds of mistakes. In the second half, offensively, we did a much better job of getting the ball to Tolu [Smith]. He was 7-of-9 in this game. We need to continue to get the ball to him. We've got to be able to knock down the open perimeter shots we get. We were 3-of-17 from three, and 10-of-12 of those were really good looks."

Q: How do you get your team prepared for these next few games coming off this rough stretch?

BH: "We have seven games left in the [regular] season. We're 14-10 [overall] and 5-6 [in conference play]. LSU, who's in the tournament, just evened up their record at 6-6 [in conference play]. That's where Alabama is as well. We've got to get ready to play them because they won today. We're playing in such a great and competitive league. Every game is a dog fight. We've got to find a way to break through this slump having lost five of the last six."

Forward Tolu Smith

Q: What do you think makes it hard for the team to close out games?

TS: "It's all about playing with grit for 40 minutes. Consistency, that's all it is. There's no super formula, and there's no magic trick. It's all about consistency and playing with grit for 40 minutes, that's it."

Q: What has made it harder for the team to close out games?

TS: “I take blame for it because honestly, as a leader, I need to step it up and tell them what I just told you guys. It takes 40 minutes of great consistency for us to get this win. We had great spurts during the game. We’ve got to do that for the whole game. It would’ve changed the outcome.”

Q: What do you guys take away from only a few games left?

TS: “We’re right there. There’s nobody else, but us. There’s nobody in the country we can’t beat. It’s just all on us. Like I said, it’s just about consistency and playing with that grit for 40 minutes. That would have changed the outcome of this game. So, we just have to go into every game knowing that we’re going to win this game.”

Q: Do you feel like turnovers are you guys beating yourself?

TS: “Yeah, it’s little mental errors. Little mistakes that we’ve got to fix clean up. Coach [Howland] harps on it. But at the end of the day, it’s on us. Coach also emphasizes that we need to limit our turnovers. But at the end of the day, we’re the players that are playing. So, it’s all on us to figure that out and fix those mental errors.”