

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball
Mississippi State at No. 25 Alabama – Wednesday, February 16, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement

BH: “First of all, I’m really proud of our guys’ effort tonight. I thought they played incredibly hard against one of the better teams in the country and a team that I think will make a deep run in the tournament because of how hard they are to matchup with. I thought that D.J. Jeffries was terrific tonight. He played well offensively and kept us in there with some great shots. In the second half, Cam Carter, who was terrific tonight, made two big three’s. We had another big shot from someone else. I can’t remember who it was, [both DJ Jeffries and Iverson Molinar] at the beginning of the first half to give us momentum.”

“We had a 7-point lead and had a number of open looks down the stretch that we just couldn’t make. Cameron Matthews had two open three’s, Iverson Molinar had an open three and a pull-up, D.J. Jeffries had an open three, Garrison Brooks had a layup and Cam Carter had a decent shot off the bounce. Needless to say, it’s frustrating. When you look at the stats, their 15 offensive rebounds were huge. That really hurt us. We did not do a good enough job boxing out. They were only 6-of-30 from three, but it did not look like that from where I was sitting.”

“[Jahvon] Quinerly played one of the best games he’s played in a long time. They took him out of the starting lineup in the last game to light a fire under him. He played like the player I voted to be SEC Sixth Man of the Year last year. It was tough for us to not have Tolu [Smith] because of the foul situation; that hurt us. I thought Andersson Garcia’s five minutes for us were huge. He had two big baskets that allowed us to take the lead, and he did a really nice job. I thought that Cameron Matthews really competed hard tonight with seven rebounds in 17 minutes. It was tough that he couldn’t get one or both of those three’s to fall because he was wide open. We’re going to keep plugging away. You can see our guys have no quit. I’m proud of them and all of the preparation they put into this game.”

Q: Can you provide us an update on the status of Rocket Watts? Also, when did you make the decision to start Cam Carter?

BH: “Rocket got hurt during Monday’s practice. I decided to start Cam after our last game. I thought CC [Carter] was great tonight. He provided an uplifting shot in the arm tonight with his intensity. He finished with 15 points, three assists and only one turnover. He also had one steal. He played terrific tonight and made me feel bad I didn’t play him earlier in the season for the team’s sake and for his own sake.”

Q: Was the decision to play Iverson Molinar off the ball more based on anticipation of face guarding from Alabama?

BH: “No, I thought it was good for him to play off the ball so he could receive more screens other than just ball screens. He usually gets it by just being handed the ball. This makes it easier on him. He played for almost 35 minutes. He’s one of the top guys in the league in minutes. I thought he played well tonight. He had some tough shots from three that just didn’t go in.”

Q: What needs to happen over this last six games stretch to get the team into the NCAA tournament?

BH: “We’ve got to win the next game. We’ve obviously got to do well in the conference tournament at the very end, but we just have to win a game. Once you win one game, you win another and then get over that hump.”

"I'm hoping that with baseball's opening day at two o'clock that our home game will get some spillover. We really would appreciate it, because we need to beat a tough, hard-nosed and physical Missouri team."

Guard Iverson Molinar

Q: We've talked about late-game execution before. What factored into Alabama taking over after Nate Oats' ejection?

IM: "We've got to be able to make late game decisions and to finish the job down the stretch. We need to make the open shots that they give us. At the end of the day, it's about coming out, making the right decisions and being strong with the ball."

Q: What's the disconnect for you guys at the end of the game?

IM: "We've just got to execute at the end. We've been learning from it, but we've to take what we've learned and put it out on the floor. We've also got to prepare in practice for [those situations] because we were up by seven with six minutes left in the game. We've got to carry over the lead and push through the last few minutes of these games."

Q: You guys took more three's than normal but missed several down the stretch. Was the strategy just to keep shooting those three-point shots?

IM: "Yeah, we shoot to make them. At the end of the day, we've just got to have confidence in ourselves and keep shooting them. I have confidence in our guys, and they have confidence in me that we're going to make those shots at the end."

Q: What did you think of Cam Carter's first career start?

IM: "I think he did good. For a first-year guy [freshman], he played pretty well. He looked like an experienced player out there. You can tell that he's learning and growing. I'm happy for him, and I'm proud of him. He's just got to keep building."

Q: How do you internally view your NCAA tournament chances, and how much pressure is on you guys over this last stretch to make a run?

IM: "I would like to say that there's no pressure, but we just have to play our hardest. I feel like we have to put pressure on ourselves. We've got to win these last games and execute at the end of the games. The next ones coming up are pretty tough. I'm going to talk to my guys and tell them we need to execute and have confidence in ourselves down the stretch. That's one of the main reasons, we need to win at the end of those games."