

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes

Mississippi State vs. South Carolina – February 1, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement:

BH: "I thought we really played great in the first half in particular tonight. I thought we came out very focused, laser-focused, on both ends of the floor. We did a great job on transition defense and our halfcourt defense. We really did a good job of making every shot tough. [James] Reese [V] was the one guy that had it going for them. We did a great job of sharing the ball and scoring. We had 45 points at the half off nine assists of our 18 baskets that we scored."

"I thought Garrison [Brooks] in particular was just fantastic in the first half offensively. With 17 points, he was dominant and really was key on why we had that big lead at the half. I thought Rocket [Watts] had his best game tonight as a Bulldog. He made some big three's when they turned zone at the second half. I was disappointed we didn't finish the game the proper way. We had too many turnovers in the last 10 minutes of the game. But overall, this was a huge win for us to get back on a win after two, tough defeats on the road last week."

Q: With more road games coming up in the last stretch, just how important is it to carry this momentum to the road?

BH: "We've got to. Our biggest game of the year is coming up Saturday at Arkansas. They're the hottest team in the league. They've won five [SEC games] in a row. I don't know if they play today or tomorrow – I'm just so focused on us. They're really playing well. I've seen them on TV and on tape against other people we're getting ready to play multiple times. So, we're going to have to be at our very best to win down there. It's such a hard place with a great home court advantage, but we're looking forward to the challenge."

Q: How big would it be for your team if Rocket Watts continues that three-point shot down the stretch here?

BH: "I think he will. I think he's turning the corner right now and playing with a lot of confidence. He's got his health back. He's not worried so much. I think he's playing much better defensively. My big thing for him is to be able to hold his own on the defensive end of the floor when he comes into the game. I thought he did that tonight for the most part, except for one play in the first half that I recall."

"I told him this was his best game tonight in-front of the whole team after, but I thought his shot was a bad shot that led them to come back when we were up by 23 [points] and didn't need to jack up a 25-footer in front of our bench. That being said, this was his best game since he arrived in StarkVegas."

Q: How do you feel Derek Fountain did tonight?

BH: "I thought Derek did great and was tremendous tonight. He had seven points and gave us great minutes. He had his best games last year against South Carolina. He was a real hero down there on the road in our win along with D.J. Stewart [Jr.] who had 29 points. He played very well down there, as well as here. He definitely is earning more minutes because he practiced well. I'm excited for Derek. I thought he did a lot of solid things for us."

Q: It's been about two weeks since you said Garrison Brooks should shoot more. Was tonight the night he started?

BH: "I told him before practice yesterday. I said, 'You need to look to shoot more today in practice and tomorrow in the game.' I mean, who wouldn't want to play for me when I'm telling you that? Shoot more! Look for the shot! That's a player's delight to have your coach telling you that, and he obviously listened because he was very aggressive tonight, especially in the first half. I'm so happy for him because he's been great the last three home games. Think about it, the last three home games against Alabama, Ole Miss and now South Carolina. He's been tremendous in each home game."

Q: It seemed like D.J. Jeffries played more under control tonight. Is that what you look for in him?

BH: "I thought he played a good all-around game, especially defensively. I thought he did a good job. He had seven rebounds and five assists. He did a lot of nice things tonight. He's coming off a tough weekend because he wasn't even here on Sunday. They had a funeral for his uncle that passed away suddenly and very young. That was very hard for him and his family. His mother's brother passed away. Our prayers and thoughts go out to their family as they continue to grieve for D.J.'s uncle."

F Garrison Brooks

Q: How did it feel to have a tone setting performance for the team tonight?

GB: "It felt good. I came out, played aggressive and just played as myself."

Q: How does the focus shift on getting the job done on the road in this last 10 game stretch?

GB: "We need to just win one game at a time. We need to have that mindset. We need to be tough enough to get it done on the road of course, but our next game is on the road. That increases our focus."

Q: How much of an emphasis was there on rebounding?

GB: "It was huge for us. I think guys like Cameron Matthews and D.J. Jefferies played really good on the boards for us. That's something they emphasize. So, it's something we emphasize. We just had to be the team who got it done tonight."

Q: Does playing without Tolu [Smith] make it seem that it takes more of a team effort when you don't have the guy who led the SEC in rebounding last year?

GB: "Right, that's a guy who when he walks in the gym already has 10 rebounds. It hurts not having him out there, but when he comes back, it's going to be great for us."

Q: What did you guys do to slow them down in the transition game?

GB: "Shakeel [Moore] and Iverson [Molinar] played really well in transition, stopping the ball and did a great job on defense."

Q: How good did it feel personally and as a team to outscore them by 20 in the first half?

GB: "It was good, we needed that. We needed to get a win, a convincing win. It felt good to get a conference win, and to expand to 5-3."

G Rocket Watts

Q: You seem to be more comfortable and back to yourself, how has the past couple of weeks been?

RW: "I've been feeling great. I've been putting a lot of work in on my shot, and on my overall game. I think we just came out and played hard and it was a team effort tonight."

Q: How important was it to the guards to slow them down in the transition game?

RW: "The scouting report for us was to have the two guard and whoever shot the ball to get back and locate their two guard. That's something we worked on all week, and I feel as though we did great."

Q: How does it feel to come back after the hip surgery and be playing good?

RW: "I feel great, and I'm not too worried about my hip. I've been trying to get my groove back by moving better and getting a lot of shots up, just putting in the work. That's my big focus right now, I've got to stay consistent with it."

Q: How much does the focus increase on the road with six of the last 10 being on the road?

RW: "The focus has to increase a lot, I feel like we haven't won a road game yet. That's our focus right now, to stay locked in, keep practicing, watching film, and to keep moving forward. It is very key to our game. "

South Carolina Head Coach Frank Martin

Opening Statement

FM: "The last two days the team spirit was really good like it is when you win three in a row. Give Mississippi State credit. They have lost some tough games here in the last little bit. They came in here on edge, defended and brought a lot of physicality to the game. That's all we talked about to our players is the physicality that they play with. We didn't do a very good job of answering the bell from that standpoint. They dictated the game offensively and defensively. You can't do that on the road against good teams expecting to win."

Q: Why did the offensive struggle so much in the first half?

FM: "They guarded us. We couldn't screen them, and we couldn't get by them off the dribble. We tried to ball screen them, but we couldn't get by them. Our big guys gave us nothing offensively so we couldn't throw it in the post. It was just bad. Their first possession in the game, they ran exactly what we told the team they were going to run. They got the ball exactly where they wanted to, and we didn't disrupt. They got it right to Garrison Brooks. He jumped up and made the shot to create the personality of the game the way they wanted to start. We played early with no purpose and no rush."

Q: What did you see in Mississippi State's rebounding?

FM: "That's who they are. I want to say they lead the SEC in rebounding margin. That's what we talked about going into the game is the physicality that they are going to play with, and we didn't answer the bell."

"I mean, in the first half, we couldn't score and put up no fight to rebound either. With Keyshawn Bryant and Wildens Leveque, we rebound as they do. They didn't and so neither did we. Neither one of the guys gave us anything there, and we missed a whole lot of shots in the first half. They shot 60 percent from the field in the first half yet they had a lot of offensive rebounds which means they got most of them. They brought the fight, and we got hit hard early. We just couldn't regain our thought process. Our personality that we fought hard to create with this team. Chalk one up to them, they got us."

Q: Is there anymore you can do in the point-guard spot?

FM: "No, it is what it is. Those are the guys we got, and we're going to keep working with them. Devin Carter knows the game and often says, 'Give me the ball, and I'm going to go score'. He's learning the hard way that that in the SEC that doesn't work. Iverson Molinar, the guy we just played, as a freshman had a lot of turnovers and shot a low percentage because he was trying to do what Devin Carter does right now. That's part of the journey. You've got to understand the college game, and you've got to understand when you can and can't go, but [Devin Carter] is trying really hard."

"Jermaine Cousinard has been playing really well for us. He didn't play well today, but he's been playing well. Jacobi Wright is going to be really good, but right now he's struggling. I was happy to see him play more aggressive in the second half when I put him in there. I thought he was really passive in the first half, and that's something I've talked to him a lot about. Those are our guys. They work, and they care so we're going to keep fighting with them."

Guard James Reese V

Q: It seemed like it was tough for you guys to create offense looks, what did you see from them defensively and what was it like offensively?

JR: "It was one of those days where we played bad, dug ourselves in a hole and let them set their defense up. I think they're one of the best defensive teams in the country. You can't dig yourself in a hole on the road. We came back out and played hard in the second half, but that's not good enough on the road. You have to play good in both halves in order to have an opportunity to come out with a win."

Q: Is there one common theme when the team's offense goes stagnant?

JR: "As a team, we just did not have any pop today. We have got to be better. I don't have anything special to say, and we've just got to play better."

Q: What do you think the cause has been with the slow starts, from a defensive or offensive standpoint?

JR: "I don't have anything specifically to pin it upon, but I will say everyone has a certain job out there. Using me as an example, I don't want to do Erik [Stevenson] and Jermaine's [Cousinard] job. It shouldn't be like that. Everyone should hold up their own end of the stick, that's when we are at our best. We need to practice right the next few days and switch our focus to Tennessee."