

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball
Mississippi State vs. Missouri – February 20, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement

BH: "I'm very much elated about the win tonight for our team. I thought our guys showed tremendous character after falling behind 9-2 then taking the lead going into halftime. We talked about not starting out the second half the way we did the first, but sure enough they came out on fire and we struggled. They ended up having the lead late in the game, but I'm very proud because our guys stayed mentally tough and found a way to get the win in a very important road game for us."

"Missouri really defends, they're very hard to score on. They were really physical, blowing up both handoffs and screens. I thought the key to the game was getting the ball inside. We got to the foul line a lot more because we got more shots at the rim that we were fouled on. We ended up making 70 percent of them."

"I loved that last play where Shakeel Moore got the rebound and went coast-to-coast, getting an and-one opportunity. He ended up missing it, but Tolu [Smith] ended up matching up on [Javon] Pickett. He did a great job of not fouling Pickett as he went up for that three. His not fouling was huge. Then, Shak got the last rebound and did a good job of holding onto the ball, sealing the victory."

Q: How fulfilling is it to see Shakeel Moore doing so well after keeping his head up through this last tough stretch for him?

BH: "I'm really happy. He's playing for both himself and his teammates. The most fun teams to be on are the ones where everyone is playing for each other. That truly optimizes him. I was happy for him to make the big three we drew up for him in the first half, and he had two steals. He also had several passes that led to guys getting fouled and played solid defensively as he always does. I'm really happy for Shak."

"I thought Andersson Garcia was huge tonight. He was a key reason we got the lead [late in the first half]. D.J. [Jeffries] got two fouls early on. So, he came in and played 15 minutes in the first half. I think he was the guy that was responsible for our eight-point lead in the first half. I'm really proud of his contributions as well tonight."

Q: How huge was this win for your team after losing so many leads and close games on the road?

BH: "This really helps us. I've gotten to experience a lot of close wins in my lifetime, and this certainly feels better. I thought Iverson [Molinar's] drive to tie the game was huge. He drove left and went left-handed. Everyone was ganging up on him and doubling him off of screens. He had to play too many minutes because it's hard not having him out there. I'm really proud of his toughness and leadership. I'm really happy for our team. The flight home just got a lot more enjoyable."

Q: Was that play with Iverson Molinar how you drew it up or was it him taking control himself?

BH: "He always has that option, but the first option was to shoot a three. The guy was recovering to him so he went left. We were going to run a play if there wasn't anything for him, but there was an open lane and he read it to make the finish."

Q: Your half court defense was good tonight. How proud were you of the half court defense by the team?

BH: "One of my assistants said they missed their last six shots in the first half, so we were really excited. That fueled our opportunity to get the lead in the first half. They made a few big three's in the second half. They were 5-for-22 with four of them coming in the second half. They started skipping the ball, and we weren't pressing it quite enough. Give them credit, they've been through a grueling schedule. This is a tough place to win. I'm just glad we could get the job done tonight."

Q: Did you think about running a play before Shakeel Moore made the game-winning shot?

BH: "No, I was totally good because you want to let the players play in that situation and to see if they can make the play. He had it going back-and-forth in that situation, and there was a good chance he was going to get fouled. He came through, and the bounce came through because it bounced around quite a bit."

Guard Shakeel Moore

Q: Can you take us through what you were thinking on that last shot?

SM: "I was just short on time. With the game tied up, we needed a basket. I saw an opportunity to get the rebound and a break, and I chose to be aggressive. I wanted to take it at them. That was my thought process late in the second half so we could seal the deal."

Q: Given your recent up-and-down performance, how did you have the confidence to take it to the rack to get the win?

SM: "It's been up-and-down for me. At the end of the day, it's just basketball. I've had to tell myself that every day leading up to the last two games, I could have the confidence to go out and play hard. That's what I did. When you play hard, everything falls in place."

Q: Was there ever a thought to pull the ball out and run a play at the end?

SM: "No, because there was only one guy ahead of me when I got the ball. I thought I could get him to go one way, fake him and then go the other. That's what I chose to do. I saw only one guy down the break. So, I chose to take advantage of it."

Q: What's been going through your head knowing you were the one to make the final shot?

SM: "It's major for me. As I've said, it's been up-and-down for me the last few games. It's a big confidence booster for me headed into next game and from here on out. It was very big that I hit the go-to, go-ahead bucket."

Q: What's have conversations with Coach Howland been like the past few weeks as he tries to encourage you to find that confidence?

SM: "He's constantly telling me to believe in myself, and that he believes in me. He's encouraged me to be aggressive shooting but also to impact the game in other areas as well. It's not all about scoring. It's about getting the ball to your teammates is a huge part of the game as well. He's constantly on me about confidence. He wants me to keep believing and to know it's just basketball at the end of the day."

Q: Has coming off the bench motivated you at all?

SM: "It has because I've started almost all of the other games, but it's not a big deal for me. I've came off the bench on many a team and started on many a team. I just had to have the mindset of playing hard in each game that we play."

Q: What was it like seeing the ball drop in?

SM: “It was a relief. The game was tied, and neither team showed signs of quitting. To see it go through was a big confidence booster for me. I can’t say that enough.”

Q: What’s the belief factor in the locker room after two big wins?

SM: “We still have belief and hope in each other. We’re going to continue to fight and try to end this season with a bang. That’s what we plan on doing. It’s just trust, being able to be there for one another and to fight for one another.”