

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes Mississippi State vs. Vanderbilt – February 26th, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement

BH: "I'm really pleased we got the win. Vanderbilt had been playing really well coming into this afternoon. [We were] Very, very concerned about them. I thought we jumped out on them early with our defense. I thought Andy [Andersson Garcia]—actually, the first group sub built a nice lead for us and really did a nice job – Cameron Matthews, [Andersson] Garcia, and Cam Carter came off the bench. We had good minutes out of our bench tonight."

"Defending [Scotty] Pippen [Jr.] is so difficult. You can see why he was the league preseason player of the year going into this year. He was spectacular and so hard [to guard] because they have shooters all around him. He's so good at making decisions. He's so smart and intelligent."

"I thought both Tolu [Smith] and Iverson [Molinar] gave us great performances today, offensively. I thought Tolu was better today, defensively, in contesting shots and doing some good things for us. So, I'm really pleased for our players to get back to 8-8 [in the SEC] and be on at least the .500 side going in to our last two games."

Q: Obviously, Tolu had to come off the bench so explain that, but what was it like from a confidence standpoint to see your team make nine of 10 free throws to close out the game?

BH: "We really did a good job from the foul line. Tolu had a few misses, he was 6-for-11 and had a few that were right there and could have easily been 8-for-11. Anytime Iverson ever misses, which happened in the first half, I'm shocked. I thought D.J.'s [Jeffries] free throws were big down the stretch there in that last minute, and Garrison made some big foul shots too. I didn't start Tolu today because he was late. So, it's simply that. He did a great job coming off the bench."

Q: What was it like to watch Scotty Pippen Jr. and Iverson Molinar go head-to-head?

BH: "We did a good job on guys like [Myles] Stute, who didn't score tonight and [Liam] Robbins, who's really good. He played great in their last game against Alabama and only had three today. So, those were a couple key guys, and [Trey] Thomas didn't score. He killed us last year. So, it's tough when you have one guy, and you let him get 32. He earned them, and he's just one heck of a player. He makes his foul shots and plays most of the game. I never had it in my mind that they [Molinar and Pippen Jr.] were two of the top scorers in the league. That doesn't mean anything, what matters is winning and losing."

Q: What did you see from your team after they cut the lead to two to settle things down and pull out the win?

BH: "I thought we showed some real toughness. We got it inside, and Tolu made some free throws. He did a good job. We were patient offensively, and I was just glad we were able to squeak it out. You're right though, to be up 10 or 11 with eight [minutes] to go, I guess the first thing I talked about with our team is that we have to handle leads better and understand time-and-score better."

Guard Iverson Molinar

Q: You guys have been in this position before in several games this year, what does it feel like to be able to close it out and get a win?

IM: "It felt good. We had a couple games this year where we weren't able to finish it out. So, it was nice just having this win at the end of the game and controlling the pace. Even though we made a

couple mistakes, we still managed to finish out the game, hit a couple free throws and make the right decisions down the stretch. So, I'm just happy for the guys. It helps build our confidence."

Q: What was it like to match up with Scotty Pippen Jr. and limit the guys around him?

IM: "It felt good. He's leading the SEC in scoring. So, it just felt good going against a player like that."

Q: As a leader of this team what does the mindset have to be like to try and win the conference tournament to make the national tournament?

IM: "The mindset is still the same. I try to tell the guys we just have to stay positive, keep going, work hard and play aggressive down the stretch. I feel like we do it for a couple minutes throughout the game, and we just have to finish it down the stretch. I feel like we've been close; we've been there before, and we got this one today. I'm glad we got it [the win]."

Q: This is the first time Tolu [Smith] has had back-to-back games with 20 or more points, what is it like to have him back more consistently?

IM: "I'm happy for him. He's been through a lot of ups-and-downs during the season. I feel like he deserves it more than anybody because he works his butt off. He works so much, you all have no idea. I'm happy for him; he deserves that and more."

Q: Coach started Javian [Davis] today and brought back Shak [Moore] into the starting lineup, are those lineups you practiced a bit more this week?

IM: "We felt like it was a better matchup for this game. We faced Scotty [Pippen Jr.] and [Jordan] Wright, so we felt like we needed more of Shak [Shakeel Moore] out there. Even though the lineup changes, we're all ready to compete. That's something the guys really do. They just kind of go through the motions whenever they get taken out of the lineup. We still execute. We still play as a team, and I'm just happy for the guys."

Forward Tolu Smith

Q: What's the feeling in the locker room after closing this game out strong and getting a win?

TS: "It feels great to be on the other end of those close games and those tight situations. We've been in those predicaments a lot. So, just to be able to overcome the adversity and come out on top, is an amazing feeling."

Q: This is the first time in your career with back-to-back games of at least 20 points, how are you feeling and are you finding a groove?

TS: "Yeah, I feel like I'm finding a groove. I feel like I'm starting to get back to that summer Tolu that was ready to come into the season. I'm just being able to contribute to my team and be more effective and efficient. It makes me feel good and it helps my team."

Q: What did it feel like coming off the bench?

TS: "It was different. It is what it is; whatever I can do to help my team win is what I'm going to do. Like I said, it was a bad mistake. It won't happen again."

Vanderbilt Head Coach Jerry Stackhouse

Q: You guys struggled to defend Mississippi State in the paint. What was it that went wrong there, and what made it so hard to prevent their players from driving to the basket?

JS: "I just think it's a sense of urgency, and we talked about it before the game. We knew that they were going to put the ball inside to [Tolu] Smith and [Garrison] Brooks. They've got big guys that play on the block that duck in, and they are tough to defend down there. You have to do your work early on that, and I thought we got caught just by our urgency to put a body on them early, to guard the posts, the three quarter post the way that we do, and we did not do that."

"We picked up some cheap fouls, I think that Liam [Robbins] got some cheap fouls early, and that put us in a bad way because we had to get him out the game and not have the lineups that we wanted in the first half. I benched him, and we did a good job of battling, still going into the half with a two-point lead. Drew [Weikert] and Gabe [Dorsey] and those guys that came in, T-Frank [Terren Frank], did a good job of just holding the fort down when our starters weren't playing well in the first half."

Q: Just curious after that last weekend with a win over Texas A&M, you put a lot of stock into that, even saying at one point that "this is our season right here." Following that up with two tough losses, close losses, what is the message to your guys going forward after this week?

JS: "We just have to continue to fight. We have two more games in this regular season. Then, we have the SEC tournament ahead of us, but obviously not the results we wanted after these last couple of games. We fought hard, but at the end of the day, you need those marks in the left-hand column."

"I think it's still about coming in and competing and trying to prepare. We had opportunities to step up and make plays, but we didn't in both of those games and that is really the end of it. As a coach, I can argue about a call here or a call there, but at the end of the day, we had two great looks to take the lead at the end of the game. We didn't step up and make the shots. I think that's the thing we have to focus on, just the tough missed plays where we play good defense and miss on the rebounds. We have to finish off these good defensive stops with the defensive rebounds, and we didn't do that a couple of times. Those wound up being the difference."

Forward Quintin Millora-Brown

Q: What made Tolu Smith so hard to defend?

QMB: "Part of our game plan was about trying to make him hit tough shots over us, and we could have done a few things better. We could have defended those cross screens a little bit harder and just stayed a little bit longer. There were a lot of things defensively that we could have given a little more effort and just done a little harder that would have helped us to get a few more stops."

Q: What did you see from Scotty Pippen Jr. today?

QMB: "He does his thing. He hit big shots down the stretch. Then defensively, he guarded the ball the entire time. It's hard to guard a man the entire time, especially their main ball handler [Iverson Molinar]. He's working over screens, getting back and just doing a good job. As a team, we just need to help him and help everyone else out just a little bit more with help side and in the gaps."

Q: What's your feeling and the locker room's feeling moving forward the last couple games then the SEC tournament. Where is the confidence level?

QMB: "I think that we all knew that when Liam [Robbins] came back, he was going to take a while. I think that we all feel like it's getting there. We play really well for stretches. Then, we lose it for a little bit, but we bring it back."

“I think we all know that it is going to come. We’re going to find that way to be locked in for 40 minutes – get defensive stops, get tough stops and make tough plays on offense. I think we all feel that it is coming. That is how all of us feel. We’re a team that is right there, in most of our games if not all of our games, so we just have to find just a little bit more.”