

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Quotes

Mississippi State at Arkansas – February 5, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement:

BH: “We showed a lot of fight tonight against a very good team in a loud, sold out arena. I thought the first half was very hard fought, and that our defense was very good. Both teams struggled to score. In the second half, I thought our offense struggled at points. Their offense was much more patient than ours to start out the half. That was what allowed them to get off to that lead.”

“We did a great job fighting back and had it down to a one-point game [at 53-52], but that three [by Jaylin Williams] was just really poorly defended. There are multiple plays you can point to that cost us. They had six turnovers, and we had 12. The biggest difference in the game was that they had more possessions. They outrebounded us by one. They had five more baskets, but we did better making our free throws from a percentage standpoint. It’s a disappointment from our players because that’s another [NCAA NET] quad one opportunity we didn’t get the job done for.”

Q: What did you think of Tolu Smith’s first game back?

BH: “I think all things considered, he did a really good job. It’s been so hard for him because he was out basically 13 days. He practiced half court for an hour on Thursday. He got to go up-and-down for 15 minutes on Friday. Then, we were here. Prior to that, he played against Ole Miss and Florida. Prior to that, he was out for another two weeks. He’s rested more in the last six weeks than he’s been able to play. It is what it is. He may have been too exhausted to guard that guy from three on the last shot [Jaylin] Williams made. It was very clear he was too far off him. It was very clear he was a good three-point shooter because that’s been pounded the last few days ad-nauseum.”

Q: It’s been an up-and-down performance for DJ Jeffries and Shakeel Moore as of late. How important is it to get them going offensively?

BH: “Shak’s [Shakeel Moore] got to be more aggressive shooting, but he also has to take better shots. He took one three from the corner tonight where the guy was right on him. We’ve got to be more patient offensively and let the game come to us. He’s got to stop penetrating and then jump stopping. He had some really good penetration and jumped in the air instead of putting it on the floor. We were forced into a number of poor shots tonight due to their defense.”

“Arkansas is so much better now than the first time we played them. Their defense is so much bigger and stronger because they’re playing older seniors who have a lot of experience. They were very physical. It was difficult to get Rocket [Watts] a lot of minutes because he didn’t match up defensively.”

“I thought Javian Davis and Andersson Garcia gave us good minutes off the bench tonight. Garrison Brooks had a double-double and did good things when he had the ball. He did have two turnovers where the ball was taken out of his hands. You can’t put the ball in front of you like that. We’re right there with them though. We had a couple of tough breaks, but we were right there. It was a very physical and hard-fought game. Give a lot of credit to Arkansas, they’re the hottest team in the SEC right now.”

Q: Do you feel that the Arkansas game plan was to try and to wear Iverson Molinar down over the course of the game?

BH: "They were trying to put a glove on him [defensively] and wear him down. I thought [Au'Diese] Toney did a great job against him. He's their best defender. He's a very good, hard-nosed, tough player. They did a great job defending him tonight. He took a couple of ill-advised shots that he's got to be smarter about. He had a great play to cut it down to three and battled hard."

Q: Does the presence of Tolu Smith make Garrison Brooks a better player?

BH: "It does, it allows him to space out more on the perimeter and to not make him our guy we rely on down low. He's going to play most of his minutes for us at the four as long as Tolu stays healthy."

Q: What has factored into your struggles on the road, and how do you get over the hump this deep into the season?

BH: "We've just got to get over the hump. The last time I looked, we were the second team out according to [ESPN Bracketologist] Joe Lunardi. A win today would have probably put us in [his projected NCAA Tournament field]. The good news is, the next three games are against high-ranked, [NCAA Net] quad one teams, all higher than Arkansas. We have our opportunities ahead of us. I think we're an NCAA tournament team. We've just got to prove it by getting a win on the road and holding serve at home."

Forward Garrison Brooks

Q: What stopped you guys offensively tonight?

GB: "They defended against us really well tonight. That was their game plan and is something they hang their hat on. They came out and executed against us by defending well."

Q: What is your team's issue on the road?

GB: "We've got to make big plays down the stretch. We're not doing that right now, and it's something we have got to figure out. That's what we have to change to get past our issues."

Q: What figured into Arkansas pulling away?

GB: "They made tough plays, tough shots and they forced turnovers. I turned the ball over. That's pretty much it. They made bigger plays down the stretch than we did."

Q: How much do you think Arkansas' lack of turnovers was a testament to their play? Do you think your defense could have done more?

GB: "I think we did a relatively good job. We forced them to take tough shots, and their shooting percentage was relatively low. We've just got to make more plays offensively down the stretch."

Q: How much do you think Arkansas' offensive rebound factored into the result?

GB: "That was a big part of it. That was one of their big things I feel they emphasized. They knew we hang our hat on offensive rebounding. So, they came out and played hard on the boards. They limited us being able to do that."

Q: How do you guys respond to a loss like this?

GB: "All we can do is learn and get better. That's what we have to do. We have to learn as a team and get better for Wednesday."