

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes Mississippi State vs. No. 24 Alabama – January 15, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement

BH: “Obviously, thrilled about the win. Great win for us today, great team effort. [I’m] really excited for our team to beat an outstanding Alabama team, a team that had come off two losses in a row. You knew that we were going to get their very best effort, and they gave it today. We had to withstand a lot of punches.

“I thought our team in the second half did a great job on the glass. I think we won by 14 on the boards in the second half, 11 for the game after being down one at the half. We forced 15 turnovers which was great. I thought that our defensive field goal percentage, 39-percent for the game [and] 27-percent from three, was outstanding.”

“I was especially pleased for Garrison Brooks. He had his best game as a Bulldog, was really dominant there tonight and did an outstanding job with a 16 [points] and 10 [rebounds] double-double. Iverson [Molinar], again, put together another masterful game with 24 points. Not only that, the guy he matched up with, [Jahvon] Quinerly, he had one of his off nights that he rarely has. Iverson had something to do with that along with our team defense.”

“I thought that Shakeel Moore was huge for us down the stretch with his foul shooting. He got fouled multiple times, stepped up every time and knocked them down. He was 9-for-9 from the foul line. I thought down the stretch there we had Andersson Garcia and Cameron Matthews in there, because they play so small—such a hard team to match up with when they’re playing small ball. We had our toughest group in there down the stretch, and it really showed for us defensively and offensively. I was really proud of those two for the contributions they made towards this win, and a lot of things they do that don’t show up on the stat sheet. The defensive help they give – just all things they do. Andersson did a great job, had a charge that got waved off, that was probably a charge. He did some phenomenal things for us today.”

Q: How does it feel getting this win in the fashion that you did when it was the determination down low that got it done?

BH: “Yeah, it was great. It was a great feeling. Our team was really fired up after the game. We put in a lot of time and the preparation in for this game, a lot of hard work. Our guys are really bought in. I’m just so proud of them, so happy for them because we knew beating Alabama, who has the number-one ranked schedule in the country in college basketball with wins over Gonzaga and Houston, etcetera, I mean they play an unbelievably difficult schedule. So, this was a huge win for us in terms of trying to put together the NCAA resume that we’re trying to do so we can get in the tournament.”

Q: What was that feeling like to celebrate after the game, and have you gotten a chance to dry off yet?

BH: “I did, I changed my shirt. I got soaked pretty good, but what a fun time to come in there and jump up and down with our players at the top of our lungs. It’s really letting off a lot of emotion and love for each other. There’s nothing better than that.”

Q: How beneficial do you feel the crowd was tonight?

BH: “Well, first of all, I’m so thankful we had such a great crowd, we really did. I thought our fans came out today. I was worried it was going to be nonstop rain for the whole day. Thankfully,

Mississippians are used to that. We had a great crowd today. I'm so thankful to all the fans that came out and supported us."

"After the game I ran over, because there was one guy I saw in particular with a certain shirt on. Every time I was waving my arms he was up, and he was leading the rest of the crowd to get up. There were so many people that responded to it, and it made a big difference in the game. The crowd noise is huge. I'm so thankful and so happy the way our fans got behind this team today."

Q: Do you feel like getting them in foul trouble is a testament to Shakeel [Moore] and Iverson [Molinar] being aggressive?

BH: "Yeah especially [Jahvon] Quinerly getting in foul trouble, that kind of put him on his heels. He didn't play nearly as many minutes as he normally plays because of that foul trouble; he played 23 minutes [and] he's averaging about 32 minutes in the conference games

Forward Garrison Brooks

Q: What enabled you guys to win despite your struggles shooting threes?

GB: "Rebound and getting stops enabled us to win. Being tougher down the stretch and being able to make plays also helped. Guys like Shakeel Moore and Iverson Molinar really helped us down the stretch."

Q: Where did the confidence from tonight come from?

GB: "I think we come into every game thinking we're going to win. I think that's not our mindset to come in thinking we're going to lose, but we just came out knowing we had to have confidence. Pay within ourselves and play hard, and it'll all work itself out."

Q: What was your reaction and thoughts about the crowd?

GB: "It was awesome. I remember just coming to games as a kid, and it was exactly the same atmosphere. Hopefully, we keep that same energy and intensity that our home crowd gives us. It helps us a whole lot."

Q: How much were Andersson Garcia and Cameron Matthews beneficial to have off the bench?

GB: "I mean they played awesome. Those guys came and gave us a lot of energy. They did their jobs. Andersson is always a great rebounder, and Cameron is always a high energy guy for us. I think that's just something we expected from them."

Q: Do you feel like this is a defense first team?

GB: "Yeah, that is what we hang our hats on is defensive rebounding. That's what the basically relies on. Whoever controls the glass controls who is in transition and controls how many more shots you get. Defensively, we all play with pride and toughness. I think that's something we hang our hats on."

Guard Iverson Molinar

Q: Even though [Tolu Smith] was back, he was not at his best. How did the team pick up the slack?

IM: "We knew he was going to be a little bit out of shape because he didn't play since, for a while, but you know we were just happy for him to be back. He, of course, took it a little slow. He didn't force anything. Some players try to force a lot and try to be over aggressive after they miss a couple games, but with Tolu that wasn't the case. He took his time. He let the game come to him, and he just executed at the end."

Q: How important was it to get this win over Alabama?

IM: "It was amazing because that wasn't the team last year that beat us three times. I felt like we needed this win. I needed this win because four times in a row is kind of atrocious. I felt like we needed this win to build confidence and then show us that we're a good team. We proved we deserve even more than this."

Q: What allowed you guys to overcome that three-point shooting?

IM: "We were over aggressive on both ends of the floor. We didn't let that affect us. We still played hard on defensive, we still played hard on offensive, we were still getting to the paint, and it happens. It's just defense at the end of the day. We get stops, we score more in the paint or from the three even though we don't shoot a lot. We don't shoot as efficient as we do sometimes, but we're still going to win. I felt like it was our defense and intensity today. We tested them on both ends of the floor, and that's what allowed us to win."

Q: How much do you feel like you guys fed off the home crowd?

IM: "It was fun. It definitely got me hyped up. It's good that our fans come out here and supported us against a really good team. I know they felt the energy, and we felt the energy as well. So, it was good having them [the fans] back. It's way better than last year when we could not have a lot of fans in there. So, I definitely thank the fans that came out here and supported us today."

Q: How do you carry this momentum to move on?

IM: "We just keep building off this. We keep building off this and we just can't get satisfied. I told you, I think our last press conference, that we're a really mature team. We've got a lot of determination and high character. I feel like having high character is not getting satisfied in wins and going for more. We've got that mentality to keep going for more and going for what we deserve."

Alabama Head Coach Nate Oats

Opening Statement

NO: "I thought we fought pretty hard for most of the game. We swamped the glass at the under-eight media timeout. Then, after that, we got outrebounded by 12. We had only given up nine offensive rebounds with less than eight minutes to go in the game. With seven minutes, we gave up nine offensive boards. So, I'm sure when the game came down to it, we weren't the best offensive rebounding team. I think we're 15th in the country in offensive rebounding rate. We ended up giving them 49-percent of their misses. It's hard to win a game when you're getting half of their misses."

"We have to mix some stuff up and make some tougher plays. We've got to call for the rebound. I think the one possession we had [given up] four offensive rebounds if I remember correct We've got to show some toughness about us. We've got to do it for 40 minutes. We can't do it for 32. We've got to find five guys on the floor."

"I thought [James] Rojas gave us some good minutes. We were on the buck. We only use him in case of emergency. We ended up in foul trouble with Charles [Bediako]. So, we put him in. He did well. He played hard and brought some toughness to the team. So, we're happy to see him back out there. We've got to start playing better. It's tough stuff."

Q: What do you think are some of the issues from beyond the arc right now?

NO: "I think some guys are second-guessing on a good shot or bad shot. [Jaden] Shackelford is a way better shooter. The ball stuck too much this year. I don't think that was a major issue tonight. Teams are switching us. If they switch us, you've got to be able to beat the switch and force out or spring the ball out. We're not going to be able to beat the switch as well as we did last year. When they switched on us last year, we were able to use Herbert [Jones] to back down on some guards. We had to double. We got the ball springing around. We haven't done much of that. We may be able to do that with [Jaden] Rojas, maybe a little bit with Noah [Gurley]."

"We've got to do a better job finding guys. We've got to create two-on-ones. We can play two-on-one and get a better shot. 8-for-29 is not good. We shot 27-percent, 28-percent from the three for the game. Shackelford is one of the better shooters. I tried to get him some looks early. He got one out of the gate. We've got to keep on Noah. He's trying to play the right way. He's playing hard. I don't think he forced too many. When you get down, you've got to force some."

"Keon Ellis, being 3-for-6, ... we've got to find Keon more shots. We've just got to have smarter guys step up and make shots too. I thought we turned some down. Darius [Miles] goes 2-for-4. He turned one down in the corner and got a travel called on him. He should've shot that one. We've got to take the ones that are there and not take the forced ones. We've got to figure out ways to create advantages on offense to force help, and we're playing the backside two-on-one. We're not doing as good of a job this year as we were last year."

Q: How disappointing is this game? How do you hope the guys respond to losing on the road?

NO: "Yeah, training to compete for a week entirely. It's hard to go back three games with five games in. With three games back and five games in, we've put ourselves behind that eight-ball in a bad way. I thought the guys would come out and compete, and they did for large parts of the game."

"Our first shot defensively was pretty good. Our guys dug in defensively. We just couldn't rebound the last eight minutes of the game. In these close games, you've got to play the full 40 [minutes]. It's disappointing. I thought we were a team that could compete for a league title. We're in the toughest place to be in for a league title at this point. So, maybe they'll figure it out and maybe it'll come. We've got to get tougher moving forward."

Q: How much of the struggles do you think are execution based and how much are just a mindset thing?

NO: "The rebounding is a mindset thing. We did have to switch on there late with some coverage stuff. A lot of that we just missed the checkouts, or we just got voided. It's a physicality deal. We're starting Keon Ellis at the three. He's a little light and thin, but Keon led us in rebounding tonight. He led us in defensive rebounding by five, and he led us in overall rebounding by seven. I'm not sure Keon Ellis is the issue, but he is the most undersized in his position of anybody on the team."

"I guess more of a mindset deal. I think it's that the guys have to get a little tougher. We've got to decide that we're going to rebound the ball if we're going to win. I told them that winning is hard in this league, really hard. We went to Missouri, analytic wise, they're one of the bottom two teams in the league. We lost there because we didn't play hard enough. Auburn comes to our place, and we're at home. We didn't lose a home game at all last year in the league. Auburn is a good team. LSU at one point, I don't know if they still are or not, was No. 1 in the country in defensive ranking. LSU comes in and wins it. We've got to play the No. 1 defense in the country if that's where they're still at."

“Winning is really hard in this league, losing is really easy. All you’ve got to do is come in with the wrong mindset, not play well or don’t play hard enough. Losing takes care of itself pretty easy for you. Winning is hard. So, we’ve got to do some hard things to win in this league. We’ve got to make hard decisions as coaches of who’s going to play and who’s not. We’ve got to find five guys who are tough enough to guard, rebound and maybe slow their offense up. The goal is not to get scoring titles here – the goal is to win games. If we’ve got to play a little different lineup to get a little tougher to win some games, that’s what we’re going to do.”

Q: What is an issue of defending without fouling?

NO: “Noah [Gurley] has had some real issues. Noah’s been playing really well. He just can’t stay out of foul trouble. He’s getting some reaching fouls with pick-and-rolls. We shortened a whole lineup with his unnecessary fouls. We’ve got to get him to stop doing it. He’s playing really good basketball. He wasn’t in long enough. He was only 0-for-1 from the three, but he was shooting the ball well. I think before tonight he was shooting 63-percent from three in conference play and was giving us different dimension. He’s a major issue with the fouls. Tonight, he played eight minutes with four fouls. It’s a problem.”

“We’ve got guys just unnecessarily fouling. You’re going to have fouls in the game of basketball. You’re trying to compete and guard. We’ve got unnecessary ones that are really hurting us. [Alex] Tchikou, Jahvon [Quinerly], Charles [Bediako], Noah, our bigs tend to be in foul trouble. [James] Rojas is undersized playing the four a lot and playing the four when he’s 100-percent healthy. I’m not surprised he had four fouls in 17 minutes. Noah’s a big one. Jahvon is a big one. Those guys have got to stay out of foul trouble. Keon Ellis played really hard for a lot of minutes tonight. I think he led us 34 minutes and came back with four fouls in a tough, physical game. I was proud of him tonight, but those other guys have got to be better for us.”