

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball

Mississippi State vs. Ole Miss – January 22, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement

BH: “I just want to say that I’m really pleased with our performance today. I thought the second half was the best basketball we’ve played in quite a while, especially on the defensive end to hold them to 33-percent after the way they scored on us so easily in the first half at 62-percent. We [gave up] 19 points in the second half, and that just speaks to how hard our guys played. We had 13 steals and 17 assists on the 29 baskets we made, which is great. We shot it great from the foul line (14-for-17) and 6-for-18 from three. It’s just so hard to be super excited because of the Tolu [Smith] situation.”

Q: Did your team change anything defensively before the second half?

BH: “We just played more of our normal defense. First half, because of how they picked us apart up there, we were aggressively doubling the ball out on the perimeter. [Daeshun] Ruffin finally started to manage that a lot better and had some big assists in those situations. They had two or three three’s that gave them the lead after we had them down good, by about seven, but give them credit.”

“I thought the second half, we played more of our normal defense but still doubling the post whenever [Nysier] Brooks got it. He still was 5-for-5 but still had three turnovers. We forced them into 16 turnovers, and 13 of them were steals. It says a lot about how hard our guys were playing defensively. I thought it was a great overall team performance. The key guy in the second half for us to stop was [Matthew] Murrell. He had 14 at the half and didn’t score again in the second half. I thought D.J. [Jeffries] was on him a lot of the time and did a really good job, but we were switching. It was less about rotations in the second half and more about having a bigger player on them.”

“I thought Iverson was really good when he was matched up with him, as well. He did a great job defensively and had a very good game — 20 points, four steals. He did a nice job for us moving the ball. I thought Shakeel Moore was great today when you look at his stat line — seven assists and zero turnovers, that’s outstanding. Then, we had good balance. I thought Garrison [Brooks] had a great game today again. For Garrison, two Saturdays in a row here against very good competition in Alabama and then Ole Miss, our rival. So, I’m really proud of him. He was more aggressive to shoot today. Our previous outing he had only taken three shots against Florida, where that’s ridiculous. We’ve got to get him more shots, and we did today.”

Q: DJ [Jeffries] helped spark that 15-0 run you guys had, how good is it to get him back in the scoring column?

BH: “It was great. A couple of his baskets that he made is when we started to break the game open. He had a drive on one that was really important. He had two of them, two really big plays. One was an and-one that he got. So, I thought D.J. Jeffries really stepped up for us today at both ends of the floor. He had three steals, which is big. I think that’s the most he’s had in one game this year, but he did a lot of good things for us today.”

Q: How nice was it for you guys to get some revenge and move to 4-2 in SEC play?

BH: “I think Ole Miss is a very good team, and I think that they’re very well-coached. They’ve been through the injury situation as bad as we have—two starters are out with [Jarkel] Joiner and [Robert] Allen ... I can totally relate to what they’ve been doing and yet, they still had Auburn down 14. So, I’m very happy that we got the win today.”

"I'm very happy with the great crowd we had today. We really had great support from our home fans. They really got behind this team and energized our guys. In that second half, they got really loud, and I felt it really made a difference in the game. So, I'm really happy for our team after a long week to finish this week off with an important win against our rival."

Q: Iverson Molinar has passed 1,000 career points, what has he meant to this offense and this team?

BH: "He's really developed into one of the better players in our league. He was very good tonight again, offensively, looking at his field goal percentage. What I was really happy about, going into tonight in the previous five conference games, he had only attempted eight three's. He took five tonight and made 40-percent of them. We need him to be more aggressive to shoot the three-ball. I was really happy about that today. His defense is so much better than it was as a freshman. He really was good tonight defensively. I think he had four steals. He was really good on both ends of the floor."

Guard Iverson Molinar

Q: Tell us what was happening in the second half of that game and talk about how the team's defense improved.

IM: "I feel like we had more momentum in the second half. When we were in the locker room, we talked about how hard we had to come out in the second half. We took the last game personally. I feel like we did the right thing. We played tougher and more aggressive, and we played together at the end [of the game]."

Q: How important was it to get back at Ole Miss after losing to them earlier this year?

IM: "It was good for us. We can't have losses in our home court since that does affect the resume. We took it personally because we lost the first game over there in Oxford. We had to get them back and win this game at home to be able to get our goal at the end of the year."

Q: What does it mean to you to reach that marker of 1,000 career points in about two and a half seasons?

IM: "It's been a journey. I've put the work in. I'm just proud and happy. That's not just 1,000 points for me. I'm going to keep going and keep putting the work in. I'm just happy to be a little kid from Panama City coming to Mississippi and scoring 1,000 points in college for Mississippi State, which is huge. I'm really happy about it and really proud to be a Bulldog."

Q: Coach Howland talked about wanting to get Garrison Brooks on offense a little bit more after the game against Florida. Do you feel like him on offense took a bigger role on offense today?

IM: "He did; he was super aggressive and offensive. He was making plays in the defense end too. I feel like we really needed Garrison to be like that on the defensive end because I feel like he's one of the best forwards in college basketball. We kept telling him to be aggressive."

Q: How much did you feel for Tolu [Smith] when he went down at the end of the game?

IM: "I felt bad since I was right there next to him, and I saw what happened. They haven't said anything about him yet, so we're all hoping that he's alright. It would be such a tragedy, after him putting in so much work during the offseason. He's one of those guys that deserves to be on the floor. He gives it his fullest."

Guard Shakeel Moore

Q: Talk about the defensive intensity going into the second half.

SM: "We knew going into halftime that they were shooting at a pretty high percentage. The first five minutes of the second half is always the most important. We figured if we came out and executed on the defensive end, then we would shut their water off in the second half."

Q: How would you describe Iverson Molinar's importance to this team?

SM: "He's everything we need. Every time he gets into the paint, he either creates something for himself or for the team. He's just a leader all-around. I think with him on our team, it does a lot for the young guys and for me as well. He just keeps getting better every day."

Q: How important do you think it is for the team to get D.J. Jeffries going the way he did in the second half?

SM: "It's very important. We're always on him to shoot the ball when he's open, because confidence is a big part of the game. Even though we do get on him about that, we're still going to lift him up every game. Everybody goes through those stretches of games where they're in a slump, but we're a team. We're going to have his back down the stretch. He helped us out a lot and gave us a huge lift. So, it's important for him to get there for us."

Q: There were five different players in double digits on points tonight. Would you say this is one of the more balanced games you've had?

SM: "Most definitely. Any time there's five of us getting double digits, that's pretty great. We continue to get better and our chemistry continues to build. It's just a great thing, any night, for any of us to get double digits coming off the bench, or as a starter."

Ole Miss Head Coach Kermit Davis

Opening Statement

KD: "It was a great atmosphere. I thought the first half was played at a high level. We played confident, offensively. The ball moved and got downhill. Second half, our inability to take care of the ball gave them live ball turnovers, and we couldn't guard them around the goal."

"One end seemed like real, real physical. Nysier Brooks, they really pushed him off his spot around the goal. I look forward to watching the film, but you know Iverson Molinar is an experienced guy. He was real good tonight. Garrison Brooks was real good tonight as well. I'm proud of our team's effort. I thought we had some great looks and couldn't finish some balls to keep the game at five or six to give us the chance. They just popped it open."

Q: Where did you see them able to start running away with the score?

KD: "They just toned up a physicality in the second half that we couldn't match. That's happened to us against Auburn, Tennessee and now against Mississippi State."

Q: What do you feel like you guys need to do to get out of this slump?

KD: "We had good practices, and we had good preparation. I thought our efforts at times were good. I thought we tried the whole game. I just thought they were physically better than us and better at making shots. We didn't get to the free throw line but eight times. We've just got to keep doing what we're trying to do. We may try some of these young freshmen this week and just see how they can impact the game."

Q: What allowed the Bulldogs to get so far ahead in the second half?

KD: "Iverson Molinar just had his way with us in the paint. Then, our inability to be able to just guard their bigs one-on-one in the post. We tried to double in the first half and just had some breakdowns. Usually, our zone has been very good against Mississippi State. We just couldn't keep them out of the paint. I just thought their players were just more physical. They looked bigger and stronger on the rim than we did."

Q: The turnovers were key in the second half. What did you see?

KD: "Their physicality just kind of overpowered us. Toughness is on both ends, and I just thought they put us off our spots. We've got to be more physical on offense too."

Forward Jaemyn Brakefield

Q: What did you feel they were doing very well in the second half that allowed them to pull away?

JB: They came out with a punch. We've got to be a second-half team, and we haven't been doing that recently. We came out good in the first half, but we were relaxed in the second half. We have to stress being a good first and good second half team and play a total 40-minute game."

Q: Where do you guys feel you were lacking?

JB: "Defense, they shot a really good percentage in the second half. We have to defend at a high level. We knew they were an inside team, and they get a lot of second-chance points. They got into the paint a lot."

Q: Depth has been an issue, what do you guys need to do to get out of the slump?

JB: "We're capable with any five we put out there, Coach Davis did a good job recruiting. We aren't going to make excuses, but any five we put out there needs to compete for 40 minutes and not just be a first half team."

Q: How do you guys become a good second half team?

JB: "Staying locked in and doing all the things to finish a game. We need to continue to be tough and not relax. When we relax, we can get into a hole. I need to take an initiative of it in practice, we need to hold each other accountable."