

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball
Mississippi State at No. 12 Kentucky – January 25th, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement

BH: “That was a really hard-fought game. I’m proud of our team and the way they fought back from a 16-point deficit. When you look at the second half, we were so much better than we were in the first half on both ends of the court. We held them to 39 percent from the field, and we also shot 62 percent from the field. We do have to make our foul shots.”

“I thought our defense, once we had them in half court, was really good. They had 17 turnovers tonight, and our defense had a lot to do with it. We only had 11 turnovers of our own. Give Oscar Tshiebwe a lot of credit. He had a double-double with 21 [points] and 22 [rebounds]. He’s a fine athlete, a strong physical player who gave us a lot of problems on the glass. We gave up three second [chance] shots on missed free throws which can never happen, but I thought we had a great job fighting our way back.”

“Iverson [Molinar] had a fantastic game, and Shak [Shakeel Moore] gave us some great minutes in the second half, including three three-pointers. Rocket gave us some good minutes off the bench, I thought Cam [Matthews] did a great job battling, and I thought JD’s [Javian Davis] minutes were good for us. We did a job competing and battling. We’ve just got to learn from this and bounce back.”

Q: What did you say to Iverson Molinar to get him to be more aggressive in the second half to get open looks in the lane?

BH: “We’ve just got to get him to be more aggressive to start games and to do it for 40 minutes. They were locked into him, but I thought we did a nice job screening. We had a couple of good layups out of our offense when they set good screens over the top. He scored good both on and off the ball. He also got to the foul line, but there were times where he should’ve gotten to the line. He shot four times and was at the rim a lot. He did a great job. He really exploded in the second half.”

Q: What was the message you were telling the team to get them back in the game during that second half?

BH: “We’ve just got to keep grinding away and taking our time. Shak hit a couple of big three’s to get us going. Iverson also hit D.J. [Jeffries] open in the corner to cut it to three. The three-pointers helped us claw back in the game, but then they tightened up which helped us even more.”

Q: Do you see this game as a good opportunity for you guys to grow as a team?

BH: “You’ve got to try to look at the ability to learn from games like these. We’re going to have more games like these. We’ve got a lot of tough road games ahead including one against the one of the best teams in the country on Saturday at Texas Tech. Hopefully, our guys learn from it. One of the biggest things is mental toughness. You’ve got to be mentally tough especially in an environment like tonight when it’s us against the world.”

Q: Given how similar the environments are, do you think this game was a good way to prepare for the game against Texas Tech?

BH: “I think being in this environment and seeing that we had great opportunities encouraged our guys. I hope they saw it and are motivated by it going forward.”

Guard Iverson Molinar

Q: What does this game do for you guys? How does it set you up for the rest of this difficult stretch?

IM: "Everyone wants to have momentum to prepare for the next game. We came up short today, but we're going to learn from this, execute and come out better in the next game."

Q: You scored a career-high 30 points, what was working for you this game?

IM: "I tried to attack and be more aggressive in the second half. My driving layups and my midrange pull up shots were working for me. I'm good with that."

Q: What can you and the team build on ahead of Saturday's game at Texas Tech?

IM: "We probably shot only 60 percent from the free throw line. We need to execute better from there and not let the crowd affect us. That is one of things we need to focus on before our next game."

Q: What is the message in the locker room and huddles during the second half to keep you guys in it?

IM: "We told ourselves to be more confident – to come out and execute plays. We wanted to be more aggressive in the second half, and that's what I feel like we did. We had a lot more swag in the second half. Our coaches did a great job of keeping us in that second half, but unfortunately we came up short."

Q: Why do you think your team was able to have so much confidence in the second half?

IM: "I don't know for sure. We learned a lot in the Florida and Colorado State games. We've got a lot of character on this team, and we acted on that in the second half. Our coaches tell us what we need to improve on, and we execute those things on the court. We've got a lot of good players on this team. I feel like we can go far."