

**2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes**  
**Mississippi State vs. South Carolina – March 10, 2022**  
**SEC Tournament Second Round**

**Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland**

***Opening Statement***

**BH:** "I thought that the second half, our defense was incredible to hold a team to 13 percent from the field with two of those baskets coming off our turnovers that led to two easy baskets. They're a good shooting team. You saw how they shot in the first half. They came out and shot like gangbusters from three. We did a better job of pressuring the ball. I thought our defense really picked up in the second half. I'm really excited about the performances of our guys. We got out 6-0. Then, we really struggled offensively. At one point, we were 4-for-16 in the first half. We did a much better job in the second half. Free throw shooting was really big for us in the first half, keeping us to where we actually had the lead because of our foul shooting.

"I thought Tolu [Smith] had a great game today. He had a double-double, 20 points and 12 rebounds. He did a lot of nice things. His teammates did a good job feeding him. [Andersson] Garcia got 14 rebounds in 24 minutes in his first start, which was incredible. When I look at Shakeel Moore's stats tonight, I went to the plus-minus. When he is in the game tonight, we're up 31 and he had five assists. When you are in there and your team is up 31, that's big."

"I thought Iverson Molinar, obviously, did a good job for us and manufactured points and handled a lot of the press and pressure that they were throwing at us all night long. Derek Fountain gave us good minutes off the bench. Fountain got six points in his 12 minutes, and we need to continue to play him because he gives us an offensive threat off the bench at that power forward position."

***Q: You guys had 19 layups, it was like a layup drill for you there in the second half. Is that just like a dream type of offensive performance from your vantage point?***

**BH:** "We got a lot of them in transition because we got so many stops. So, it took them out of their pressing mode, and we got out. We really pushed the ball. I bet that we had -- I don't believe there were that many layups. We were trying to get it inside to Tolu [Smith]. He had a bunch of those, and some were definitely guarded, but I think we got a couple of really big transition baskets that were easy layups. I also thought we got a lot on offensive rebounding. [Andersson] Garcia got six offensive rebounds tonight and had a number of those that were putbacks or got him fouled. I'm really proud of our team, and the fight and toughness we showed. You love to start out like that in game one."

***Q: When did you decide to make that move to start Andersson today, and what did you think of his performance, especially the way he came out on that first possession with the block and then had a bucket a couple of possessions later?***

**BH:** "I decided that after our last game. I'm wearing a suit, and I'm starting Andersson. We're changing it up. I'm glad that we get to play another day against a great team, arguably the team that was the hottest at the end in our league in Tennessee."

***Q: Ben, what did you think of Shakeel's performance and kind of how he contributed in ways different than scoring?***

**BH:** "I thought he was phenomenal tonight. Look at the numbers, plus, he played really good defense, which doesn't show up all the time on a stat sheet. He had zero defensive rebounds in the first half, but he had four in the second half."

"We talked about that at halftime. We needed him, and Iverson to get more boards. He really took it to heart. I thought he was really good all the way around. I thought he was really good in transition getting the ball. I was really excited for him. That really loosened him up, and that dunk at the end was fun for him, as you saw.

***Q: You mentioned Tennessee there towards the end, one of the hotter teams. Tight game at least in the first half and pretty much throughout the last time you guys played. Just generic scouting report with Tennessee at this point.***

**BH:** "We were up with five minutes to go and gave up a three to Josiah Jordan-James on the inbound, but they're really good. I'm so impressed with them, and how they move the ball. They're top ten in defensive efficiency in the country. They have depth."

"The bigs have stepped up and taken over for the kid they lost, who was really a good player. I love [Santiago] Vescovi as well. I voted for him first team. I can't believe the media got that wrong. I was stunned. He is their most important player. Those two other guards are great, I love Chandler, I love Zeigler, but Vescovi, man, all the coaches voted for him. I bet he was unanimous first team. He is really good. Then James, the lefty, phenomenal. He is having a great year. I voted for him for all league second team. I had three players on their team on all-conference. That's what I think of Tennessee."

**Guard Shakeel Moore**

***Q: Shak, we've talked before with you about some of your struggles shooting. As Coach Howland mentioned there, you were plus 31 tonight. How much is that reminding you of just making plays outside of scoring?***

**SM:** "Like you said, it's not all about scoring. There are other ways to affect the game: getting rebounds, finding the open man, and getting our teammates better. It's real important, but I still continue to keep that confidence shooting the ball."

***Q: They had that missed dunk there in the second half, and you guys went on a huge run after that. How much do you kind of think that dictated momentum? It went from potentially being a one-point game to being a five-point game, and you didn't really let up after that.***

**SM:** "We just battled to the end for all 40 minutes. We came out in the second half and held them to 13 percent shooting from the field. After that dunk, momentum completely went our way. We took advantage of it, and it was up from there."

**Forward Tolu Smith**

***Q: Same question to you Tolu.***

**TS:** "To branch off what Shak said, it [the missed dunk] was just the momentum shift. That dunk just really helped us. After that point, we were just playing how we needed to play."

***Q. Tolu, this year the rebounding dictated which way it went. How much of a point of emphasis was that, especially there in the second half?***

**TS:** "It was a point of emphasis. I think Coach Howland did a great job of emphasizing that. Like he said, it was a point of emphasis in both games. For us to come out and do what we do, I think Andersson did a great job. He had 14 rebounds. That's great for a wing man, so just getting all those rebounds helps us, and I think it helps us continue with this tournament."

## **South Carolina Head Coach Frank Martin**

### ***Opening Statement***

**FM:** "We just couldn't deal with them inside. They made a consensus effort of attacking the paint on offense. In the first half, we made some three's. It offset the fact that we were getting outplayed in the paint."

"In the second half, we shot 13 percent from the field. So, we couldn't offset all the lack of production in the paint offensively and defensively because it wasn't just them driving the ball and scoring it. We just couldn't come up with the ball, and we got beat to loose balls. We got beat to the offensive glass."

"Andersson Garcia, his personality on his team was clear as day today. I think he had three offensive rebounds in the first five possessions of the game. He created the personality of how the game evolved. Whoever wins in the paint wins the game, and they dominated the paint. We had no answer there."

### ***Q: Frank, you ever sat through a worse 20 minutes in your coaching career in terms of offensive performance, defensive performance, the whole ball of wax?***

**FM:** "I mean, I don't think our effort was bad. They did shoot 39 percent from the field. It's not like we didn't defend. We started fouling them too much towards the latter part of the second half, but offensively I was disappointed in some of the shots we took."

"I thought -- the question that was asked earlier about Keyshawn's [Bryant] play, that wasn't the only one. It was a -- I want to say -- I'm going off the top of my head here, but there was about a five, six possession segment where we go Keyshawn break-away and Devin [Carter] creates a steal. We end up with Devin and Jermaine [Cousnard] in the two-on-one, and Jermaine decides to shoot enough to dribble three in the open court. Then, Devin comes down and makes a great pass to James Reese. He has a wide open three, and he don't let it go. Instead, he passes it to Brandon [Martin], and Brandon shoots an air ball. Those are three really deflating plays."

"We've done different things to get the ball in there this year, and the game is where we can create paint -- not touches because we get paint touches, but paint points, we've won. In the game that we haven't, we don't win. It's hard to win shooting 12 percent."

"By the way, Tolu Smith, there was a reason he was a preseason first team all-league player. He has been battling injuries all year, but now he has played for the last ten games, I would say, eight games maybe. He is a handful, and he created major problems for us."

### ***Q: If this was your last game and you know who is coming back next year, perhaps maybe the bulk of your players, with what you have coming in, I mean, what kind of feeling do you personally have about next year to maybe elevate another couple of positions and not be on the bubble, but be in the tournament at this time of the year?***

**FM:** "Yeah, Phil, I think our team is in a great place right now with the guys that are in place that are returning players. Obviously, the two guys that were here, they walked on Senior Day just to make sure that they had a Senior Day, but I don't know."

"We've got to have a conversation when we get back, but I'm under the impression those two guys want to come back and play next year. You don't have those conversations in February. You don't have those conversations in March. You're trying to win games. You're trying to get to the postseason."

"Now that the season ended, it turns to individual stuff, but we have signed some really good players. We obviously signed two, and there's one that I can't talk about right now that is a really good basketball player. I tend to help players get better. So, all the guys that are in our program, take a step forward and improve. I'm excited. I couldn't be happier than what I am right now, and I'm excited for all those guys. I'm excited for what our team can be next year."

**Guard Erik Stevenson**

***Q: What are the emotions coming off of this, and what's your view going forward with the NIT or whatever might be next for you guys?***

**ES:** "Emotions are obviously down right now. It could possibly be James Reese's last game of his college career, so he is obviously feeling it right now. It could be the last game of a couple of guys' careers in that locker room, so it's a tough moment. It's a tough way to go out. We're going to try and stay optimistic. Hopefully, Sunday night we see our name on an NIT board somewhere and go from there."

***Q: Offensive consistency has been an issue all year. When this offensive isn't clicking like it wasn't tonight in the second half, what's going wrong for you guys especially in the back court?***

**ES:** "When the ball is not dropping, guys' individual confidence level goes down. When those confidence levels go down, then the team camaraderie goes down. Then the team energy and the team moxie and all those things start to drop. When you are getting killed in the paint like that, it's just deflating. We got some open looks and didn't shoot some open looks. When we got some open looks, we didn't convert. 13 percent in the second half crunch time, is not going to get it done. Yeah, just it's a bad offensive night. "

***Q: You all want to run on a ten-point deficit down to three. Keyshawn [Bryant] had the dunk and missed. How did that play change the game? What did you all feel after that?***

**ES:** "That would have been huge. I think we were down three or five points at that point, something like that. We got a turnover and had the most athletic guy maybe in the league on the break, and he couldn't convert. I think they came down and had an and-one. That's a four, five-point swing right there. Instead of cutting it to one, the one-possession game, it went back to a two-possession game. I'm not saying that that should have led to a 22-point loss, but it did, so that was a big play in the game. It is what it is."

***Q: You played Mississippi State three times this season. Was there anything differently that they showed especially as the game went on? I'm sure you would say mainly from an execution standpoint, were they doing anything than you guys maybe expected?***

**ES:** "Obviously, they annihilated us in the paint. 42-16 in the paint. Yeah, it was the hustle plays for me. 50-50s, offensive rebounding. When you get beat like that in the paint, you have no chance to win. That's their MO. They have two really good bigs, and they showed it tonight."