

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes
Mississippi State at Virginia – March 16, 2022
NIT Round of 32

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement

BH: "It was a really tough, hard-fought game. We really struggled to score early in this game and played much better offensively in the second half. We fell down eight [27-19 at halftime]. Then, scored four or five baskets in a row to start the second half."

"At the end of the day, as I look at the stat sheet, we had 14 turnovers to their nine. That's the difference in the game. Both teams shot 50-percent from the field. We had four three's, and they had two. They had a few more shots at the foul line, primarily because we were fouling at the end of the game. The turnovers were the difference."

"Having coached against Tony [Bennett] in the past, this is the kind of game you expect. It's not anything new for me, but it's new for our players. They are so patient offensively. I think Tony is one of the three best coaches in all of college basketball, and I thought that was proven here tonight. I have so much respect for what he has accomplished at Virginia, and what he accomplished at Washington State where it's next to impossible to win. He got them as high as number five in the nation back in 2008. He does it the right way. He is unique, a good Christian man and you guys are so blessed to have him."

Q: You guys did a good job of denying Jaden Gardner the ball in the first half. What changed in the second that allowed him to get loose?

BH: "I thought they got him the ball in the high post a bit more. Part of the game is that we're playing our guys a lot of minutes. They wore our defense out. Our defense early in the game was really good. They shot 43-percent in the first half. I felt our defense was outstanding. That's just what happens against Tony's teams. They wear you down because of their very good philosophy. They want to have the ball on offense more than they do in defense, kind of like in the NFL. It's a really smart way to play. I think that's probably the biggest factor."

Q: What was it that Reece Beekman did as an individual defender to cause your guys trouble?

BH: "They played good help defense, but Beekman finished second in voting for ACC Defensive Player of the Year. I think that speaks volumes. We've only seen him on film since we found out Sunday night whereas they're seeing him every day in this league."

"He's not only a great defender, he's a great passer. He had six assists and is top 10 in the country in assist-to-turnover ratio. He's a bright intelligent player and is a special talent. He and Gardner are the two difference makers with 30 points between the two of them."

Q: Does talk about your future as a coach creep into the locker room, and did you feel it had an affect on your players at all?

BH: "You'd have to ask them that. You had two players [Iverson Molinar and Tolu Smith] in here earlier. So, that should have been directed to them."

Q: What was this environment like for you to coach in tonight?

BH: "It's a great environment. They've been spoiled with great college basketball over the last 13 years here. Don't ever take it for granted."

Guard Iverson Molinar

Q: What made Reece Beekman so difficult for you to play against today?

IM: "I feel like he's one of the guards we have in the SEC that never gives up on a play. There's no break on the court when he's defending you. He did a pretty good job today."

Q: How much did you guys go into today's game wanting to bring home a win for Coach Howland?

IM: "We go into every single game and play hard. All the rumors going on don't matter, we just play our hardest. It really doesn't matter what is said on the outside. We focus in on our objective from the beginning which was to play hard and make the best out of the game. That's what we do every game."

Forward Tolu Smith

Q: What was challenging about Jaden Gardner tonight?

TS: "I think we did a great job in the first half of limiting his touches and his midrange jumper. He was in foul trouble in the first half. But then in the second half, he started getting hot from the midrange and got a feel for the game to come into himself. I thought we did a great job to start the game, but he heated up in the second half."

Q: Were you guys at all disappointed about not being able to play this game at home, and do you think it affected the game?

TS: "I was very disappointed. A home court advantage is a big advantage. Having that intensity boost on a home stage is better than anything else. Not being able to play at home was tough. This was a great crowd. It's one of the best schools in the ACC. It was a great game and a great turnout for them."

Q: How much did you guys go into today's game wanting to bring home a win for Coach Howland?

TS: "To piggyback on what Iverson said, we go into every game expecting to win regardless of what's going on outside the court. I think we had a lot of adversity this year, especially myself. Coach Howland did an amazing job handling it. There were a lot stretches at the end of a lot of games without another big or guard of ours. We had a lot of injuries on our team. I'm not trying to make any excuses, but it's tough for any program to go through that. I feel that Coach Howland did an amazing job. Personally, I'd love for him to come back next year."