

2022-23 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes
No. 21 Mississippi State vs. No. 8 Alabama – December 28, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: What do you think is the issue with free-throw shooting?

CJ: "If I knew that, I'd fix it. I can talk about this because I know the kind of man he is. The elephant in the room [is that] Tolu Smith missed 12 of our 18 [free throws]. The other guys, if you add them all up, shot a respectable percentage. He [Smith] has been shooting them so well. He struggled out the gate. If you look game-by-game, he was much better the last three, four or five games than he was the first four or five games. It felt really good for all of us. He's going to get fouled a lot because of his game. I'm not sure what happened tonight. He just missed them early. That can cause some anxiousness and cause him to lose confidence. I've been coaching long enough to understand that it just becomes contagious. You could feel the crowd saying, 'Oh my gosh.' It's not the reason we lost the game. We had other areas that we need to get better at, but certainly it was an issue for us tonight. Hopefully, it will get better going forward."

Q: What do you take away from the second half performance?

CJ: "We've got to play better. The first thing I told the team was that they played better than us and deserved to win. You could knit pick it and break it down like we do. Certainly, we're going to watch the video and try to learn and grow. We'll try to show them what we did well and what we didn't do well. Then, we've got to move on. There's going to be a bunch more of these obviously. We got a little bit of a break before we play again. We've got to know who we are. We are who we are, and it's probably not going to change a whole lot. We've certainly got to fine tune it and be more efficient at both ends of the floor. We've got to stay with who we are as a basketball team personality and stick to our strengths for 40 minutes if we want to win games in this league."

Q: Could you talk about the environment tonight and the atmosphere caused by the crowd that showed up tonight?

CJ: "It was awesome. I've heard about this place from other people. Once I found out it was sold out, I knew this was going to be cool. I certainly was focused on the task at hand and the buildup in what we do. For 15 or 20 seconds as they were doing starting lineups, I tried to take it all in. It felt good."

"I feel so bad for our fans. They wanted to get behind us so bad, and we just didn't do much for them in the second half to get them to play a part in trying to win one of these games." It wasn't because people weren't in those seats. They were revved up. They were ready to go, and it was really cool to be a part of that atmosphere. I feel really bad that we didn't deliver, but hopefully they'll continue to support us."

"I think our kids compete and play hard. We've got to go to Tennessee next. Then, we have Ole Miss coming here on a Saturday afternoon. I would hope that we have another situation like we did today, where it's sold out or close to being sold out because I know what that game means to people around here."

Q: How do you expect your team to react from the last couple of games moving forward?

CJ: "That's a great question. I don't know the answer to it because I'm new with this group. The last game we lost we went on Christmas break, so we all kind of got in the holiday spirit as best we could. Then, we reconvened. I was really focused on Alabama with three days prep going into conference play. I'm not trying to be coy, but I really don't know. We'll find out in the next few days what our mindset is going to be, and if we have any hangover effect of this loss hurting our energy and focus in practice."

"We're going to do our darndest. There are at least 18 more of these [SEC games] and one conference tournament game. So, there are going to be a lot of opportunities ahead of us and a lot of challenges. At some point, we're going to have to put this behind us and get ready for the next one."

Forward D.J. Jeffries

Q: What allowed Alabama to pull away in this one?

DJ: "We just started missing shots. They started hitting shots and making plays down the stretch. When they started to build that lead, it was hard for us to come back. We'd make a run. Then, they'd come back and hit more shots. It was just us not making shots, really. The main factor was that we didn't play our best."

Q: Shooting from the foul line was tough tonight. Do you think Tolu got in his own head tonight about free throw shooting?

DJ: "Yeah, a little bit. You know how it goes, you miss a couple, and you start thinking about some other stuff. At the end of the day, we're going to support him regardless. We're trying to help him and motivate him. He knows he has to do better, and we know we have to be better. At the end of the day, he's going to come in, work on it and get better."

Q: What do you take from this opener, and from facing the No. 8 team in the country?

DJ: "You just learn from your mistakes. They came in and played well. They showed why they're the No. 8 team in the nation. We just have got to learn from it. We were in the game, we were there. All it took was some tough plays, but we can learn from this and grow in the SEC. "

Alabama Head Coach Nate Oats

Opening Statement

NO: "Mississippi State is a tough team. They make it tough on you and make you turn it over. I think we had 19 turnovers tonight which isn't good. I thought we were able to overcome that with how hard we played, and we were able to outrebound them. They really hang their hat on how hard they play so I was happy to see that we were able to outrebound them."

"I thought that our defense was better than theirs. We chart blue-collar points and have 17 more blue-collar points than them. We made some tough plays and got onto the floor. I was proud of our guys. We overcame a couple of their guys having really good shooting nights. KeShawn Murphy was 3-for-3 in the first half. Will McNair Jr. stepped out and hit a three on us as well. I think that counteracted the fact that Tolu [Smith] couldn't make a free throw. That obviously helped us a ton."

"Our guys stepped up. I thought Brandon [Miller] stepped up and made big shots when we needed him to. I thought that Jaden [Bradley] did a great job of running the offense tonight with seven assists. That was big for us. I thought that he was great against their press. I thought that our depth helped us a ton tonight. We got into foul trouble. Charles [Bediako] got into foul trouble in the second half, and [Nick] Pringle had to play more minutes than he was used to."

"I'm proud of the team. Road wins are tough to get in this league. That is evident by what happened tonight. There were a lot of teams that went on the road tonight and were not able to get a win. Beating a top 25 team on the road convincingly is a great win for us."

Q: When Tolu Smith was struggling from the free throw line, how did that play into your strategy if at all?

NO: "You would think that it did because we kept fouling him so much. However, we didn't do it intentionally. I was upset with some of our guys that they didn't make the right play, and they fouled. On the times that he missed both free throws and they did not get any points in the possession, that was big for us."

"Tolu is one of the best players in the league, and they were pulling him out with eight minutes left to go in the game. A big part of our game plan going in was how we were going to stop Tolu. I think that we did a great job of that."

"We did a great job shooting free frows in practice today. [Nick] Pringle has been in the gym a lot working on his free throws. We went 78 percent from the line tonight. There are a lot of things you have to do in the game of basketball to win, and I think that free throws are one of the most important."

Forward Brandon Miller

Q: How exciting was the SEC opener in front of a sellout crowd on the road?

BM: "I felt like it was a great atmosphere. I feel like we responded to adversity well to get a good win versus a good team."

Q: What was the defensive plan on Tolu Smith?

BM: "Tolu Smith is a fantastic player and probably one of the biggest centers that we will face in the SEC this season. We just came together as a team. We have preached defense since the summer. That is what we love to do best. "

Forward Nick Pringle

Q: How exciting was the SEC opener in front of a sellout crowd on the road?

NP: "We fought through adversity a lot. We just stuck together. We knew that they were going to have a run. It was quiet for us for a little bit, but we stuck together to bring us to a win."

Q: What was the message after halftime to start the half on a run?

NP: "We locked down on defense. We had 10 stops going into the media, that was just huge for us. We started building defense on defense. Brandon [Miller] started playing great defense which was leading to offense."

Q: How did you guys adjust to getting into foul trouble?

NP: "We play against each other every day in practice. We know who we can put out there and do their job. We did get into foul trouble tonight, but we always stayed positive. We're self-motivated by each other. That's what I love most about this team."