

## **2022-23 Mississippi State Basketball Postgame Quotes**

### **Mississippi State vs. South Carolina – February 28, 2023**

#### **Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans**

***Q: You talked about Senior Night and balancing the emotions of the night. Did that kind of play out how you thought it would?***

**CJ:** “You never know. You can’t gauge what’s going on in people’s minds. If we had that talent, we wouldn’t be sitting here. I don’t know. That’s something you will have to ask the players. Certainly, the game didn’t unfold the way we wanted it to. It was like a glorified pickup game in terms of the offense [at the beginning]. Both teams were scoring at will, and that was frustrating I’m sure for both coaching staffs.”

“I loved how we were clicking on the offensive end, but we didn’t seem as engaged. We weren’t getting into the ball. We weren’t dictating. We weren’t getting any deflections. A lot of that is because how well South Carolina played. We knew going in that they were a different feeling looking basketball team than they were seven games ago when we played them in Columbia. We told our guys and showed our guys that they’ve gotten better. They’ve continued to improve. They’re in better shape. They are guarding better, and you saw it. They are a better basketball team. They’re a dangerous basketball team right now. They can beat a lot of teams in our league. A week ago, they took Alabama to overtime. They play well, they played really well. Fortunately, in the second half, our defense finally took hold and got some turnovers that turned into offense.”

***Q: I thought when Shak [Shakeel Moore] made back-to-back shots and drew those two offensive fouls was crucial. How crucial was that sequence in your opinion?***

**CJ:** “Well, we were talking about it in the huddles. Who’s going to take a charge? I don’t think we had taken one up until that point. We’re not one of the teams that takes the most in the country, but we usually take one or two at least a game. We kept talking about how they’re driving in there and playing off one foot, and no one is coming up from the help side to stick their nose in there. They were big plays. They were huge plays. They were daggers and game changers. I’ve had some guards in the past and one of them is on my staff [Shunn Buchanan] that was really good at that. It’s really nice to see.”

***Q: What did you see from Shawn Jones Jr. tonight?***

**CJ:** “I like talking about that. He keeps getting better and better. He made some huge shots especially in the first half. He makes some plays where you go, ‘Wow!’ In the first half, he was doing a little curl cut, and Shak [Shakeel Moore] threw it to him and threw it way behind him. I remember going live saying that was a turnover, but he reached back and grabbed the ball. He turned and dribbled it once. Then, he dropped it off to someone else. I don’t know if there’s anyone on our team that could’ve made that play. If you don’t remember, you have to go back and watch it, because it was an incredible display of his length, feel, and just instincts. It was like he had magnets in his hands. He just keeps coming and coming. He’s very confident. The shot he took in the second half in front of our bench. I didn’t think that was probably the best shot. He was running pretty hard into a transition three, but he’s got a lot of confidence in himself.”

***Q: How important has the crowd played a part in what you are trying to build at Mississippi State?***

**CJ:** “I can’t speak for them, but hopefully they like how we play. Hopefully, they like the way our kids get after it each and every night. We aren’t perfect, and we talk about that before every game. We know that we are going to make mistakes. I hope that people love the competitiveness of our team. We try to be first-class all the way around.”

"The product on the floor is the time for us to be in front of the public eye. I don't know why it increases or why they keep coming back, but we certainly appreciate it. It always helps us. It helped us again tonight. You can feel them. You can hear them, and our guys fed off it. Hopefully, this is the last time that we play in this building this season."

***Q: How important are gritty wins when the season starts becoming a one-and-done situation?***

**CJ:** "There's no question about it, these are important. In terms of where we are at within the season, we are in "survive and advance" mode. We don't draw pictures on the scorecard. We will certainly dissect the film and learn, but at this point of the season... it's all about winning the next game. It's probably me that needs to remember that more than anyone else."

"As a coach, sometimes you get frustrated when your team doesn't play as well as you want them to play. That has always been an issue for me. As I get older, I have come to realize that you just have to get the "W's". You just have to learn how to string them together. Once you get into a tournament-type format, it doesn't matter, you just have to win. You've got to have some grit to you if you are going to win or come from behind in games."

***Q: What's it about this team that allows for the momentum to keep rolling from game to game?***

**CJ:** "I think that a lot of coaches say this, but the vibe that I feel when I first walk in the gym or when the players can't see me, is different. They really like each other. They vibe well together. The comradery amongst our players is very high. That always helps. As a coach, you always keep your fingers crossed when it comes to that subject matter. Having really good kids always makes a difference as well. I have said that all year long, the quality of people that we have here in our locker room is off the chart. That makes a difference as well. We have some older guys here who have never gotten to experience playing in March Madness. It's now a realistic goal for them now. There's a lot of basketball left to play before we are at that point, but they can feel it. They're hungry for it. That has been a big goal for them, and it keeps them fighting every day."

***Q: How special is it to see Tolu Smith get his moment with the crowd late in the game?***

**CJ:** "At this point, I'm glad that it happened. I've been kicking myself that I did it too early. It is not like I haven't been there and done that ... It was awesome for the fans to give him a round of applause one last time, and it was not only great for Tolu [Smith] but the other guys on the floor as well. Eric [Reed Jr.] had already been subbed out, but for D.J. [Jeffries] too. It was cool. I think if you get that opportunity as a coach in your last home game, you take advantage of it. It's something that they will remember, and the family will remember for the rest of their lives."

**Guard Shakeel Moore and Forward Tolu Smith**

***Q: What was going through your mind when you take those big charges?***

**SM:** "Just winning plays. Coach [Jans] stresses the importance that it's going to come down to the wire and who can make the winning play. I felt like those two plays were the game changer."

***Q: This was one of the team's higher scoring first halves of the year. What were you and your teammates seeing offensively in the first half?***

**TS:** "Coach Jans was emphasizing attacking the paint. They don't really have a lot of shot blockers. They just have a lot of big bodies. We just have to attack the paint, get fouls, inside-out three's and things like that. That's how we are so productive in the first half."

***Q: How did you handle the emotions of Senior Night, and what's it like getting a win at the Hump in your last game?***

**TS:** "It's all starting to hit me now. I wasn't too worried about the Senior Night before the game because I know how impactful this game is to our resume and to our team. It's starting to hit it me. It's a surreal feeling to play my last game in The Hump."

***Q: How special was it to get subbed out one final time at The Hump?***

**TS:** "It was a great feeling. I love Starkville with everything from the bottom of my heart. I enjoyed every second of my time here. I loved hearing the fans scream my name and come to the games consistently. I just love being in The Hump, and I love being in Starkville."

***Q: How excited are you to you to have the opportunity to win Saturday and get closer to March Madness?***

**TS:** "We're very excited. We know what we have to do, and we want to take this opportunity. I try not to get into the Bracketology too much, we just know we have to win. We have to keep winning, and that's what we're going to keep doing. We're going to keep practicing hard and getting these wins."

***Q: What did you see from South Carolina offensively especially in the first half?***

**SM:** "They were just hitting shots. Meechie [Johnson] was hitting some deep three's and had a few from the logo area. We just needed to lock down and lock up defensively."

***Q: What changed at the end of both halves to allow for big offensive runs to end the game for State?***

**TS:** "I feel like it was just our defense. Our defense keeps us in the game every time. I feel like we have a chance in any game with our defense. We knew that the offense was going to come if we were patient. That was exactly what happened, and we were able to get the win."

***Q: Was there anything said in the huddle that gave you all that energy to finish the game?***

**SM:** "Just our togetherness. I would say that Coach [Jans] stressed that this is a different team that came into The Hump tonight from when we played them a few weeks ago. So, he talked about getting strapped in, playing good defense and coming down to the last possession."

**South Carolina Head Coach Lamont Paris**

***Q: That was a well contested game. Do you feel it's tough when you feel like your own mistakes and turnovers cost you this game.***

**LP:** "We spent the whole time at halftime talking about defense, and some things that we could do to improve defensively. We did that in the second half. I didn't talk enough about turnovers. Obviously, we turned the ball over. I was told we had the one stretch, and I knew it was a lot in that stretch. I was told that over 17 possessions, there was nine turnovers. A couple of them pick sixes, it changes everything. It changes the confidence as a player. It changes when you're a coach, and you call a specific play. It changes your confidence in play calling. You see something that you can take advantage of. Then, a guy tries to do too much or throws it too late or too high or too low. Then, the next thing you know, nine turnovers in 17 possessions."

***Q: You took advantage going 16-of-17 from the free throw line and 12-of-13 during the second half.***

**LP:** “Anytime, you put pressure on the basket. We’ve been amazingly enough much better at attacking the rim. We still have a long way to go with that. But if you can add that aspect and that component to your offense and push pressure on the defense. It was a good meeting with the guys in there. I told them I felt bad for them. I told them what we did well, but there’s still room to grow. This team can play. If we stick to what we do well and we compete physically, this team can play. If we make shots, we can beat a lot of people. We will just have to get back to the drawing board.”

***Q: What’s Shakeel Moore doing well to give your defense problems?***

**LP:** “Well, he’s driving and getting to the basket. He’s finishing. He had a couple floaters, and I do the math on those consistently. Those aren’t shots that normally guys make consistently. He made two or three of those, he made it to the basket a couple times. We didn’t make him shoot as many three’s as possible. We should have had him play in a way where he took a couple more three’s. The zone would help us do that, but they attacked that well ... He got comfortable. He got into the paint and around the basket. That was what we didn’t want him to do.”

***Q: Senior Day on Saturday with Georgia coming up to prepare for that and hopefully take some momentum to Nashville.***

**LP:** “We definitely want to do that. We also lost in overtime at their place, and that was a game we turned the ball over 16 times in the second half of that one. We lead the whole game. So, that was a recurring thing to that end. We want to win for a lot of reasons. Senior Night, last game of the season before heading to the conference tournament, and we haven’t won a conference game at home. So, we want to also do that for our fans who have been great. We want to do that for them.”