

## **2022-23 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes**

### **Mississippi State vs. Missouri – February 4, 2023**

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

##### ***Q: What was working defensively for the team?***

**CJ:** “First, tip of the cap to Coach Brooks. He had the scouting report. I have a ton of respect for Coach Gates and their staff. I’ve known him for a long time. I’m a big fan of his, personally. He’s a done a tremendous job in his first year at Missouri. Their crowds, their record and their style of play is very unique. It was the hardest prep that I’ve had since I’ve been the coach here in terms of them playing a style that you don’t see often. Not just with the trapping, pushing and running, but the small ball. They basically start two forwards at the same time, and they’ll bring in some fives off the bench to play a little more traditional.”

“They never let you relax. They mess with you when you take the ball on the side out no matter where it is. Underneath the inbounds, they play a funky zone that goes to man. They played some zone in the half court tonight which they don’t do a ton of. They just never let you relax. They just keep pounding on you. They’re just a nuisance. They basically rely on you breaking down mentally and physically and just take the ball. That’s why they’re one of the leading turnover teams in the country.”

“I thought our guys had great intensity and focus from the beginning. They were really good in preparation for this game. I felt good leaving shootaround today about where they were at in terms of their focus and understanding. It’s not about what the coach knows. You can watch film until the cows come home. It doesn’t matter. It’s about what they know when the ball is tipped. Coach Brooks and the rest of the guys did a good job in making sure they knew what we were trying to do.”

##### ***Q: When the team loses seven of eight, how do you keep this team focused to rebound the way that they have?***

**CJ:** “We never once talked about ‘in a row.’ That never came out of my mouth to the team. I don’t remember saying that to anybody, people I talk to outside of work or people at work. Obviously, I knew, but we never talked about it.”

“After the TCU win, I talked to the media and to the team. It was emotional for me because I was so proud of them. They kept working. They didn’t start pointing fingers. They didn’t listen to the noise about ‘You should be doing this or coach should be doing that.’ I’m sure there was some of that. I think it’s a testament to who these guys are and how they feel about one another, hopefully a little bit of a belief in what we’re trying to do. Not only with this team but with our program for the long term. I was as proud as I’ve been of a team in a long time because it was hard. It’s hard, and I kept telling them that we’re a good basketball team. I don’t care what the ‘in a row’ is. We’re a good basketball team. I think we’re going to get a chance to show it if we can stick together, block the noise out, and keep working, and they did that.”

##### ***Q: What has it been like to watch attendance and the sixth man grow and stay consistent throughout the season?***

**CJ:** “We’re just appreciative of the Bulldogs coming out and supporting this team. I didn’t know what to expect when I arrived. I had never been here in terms of a game or a venue. They’ve been very receptive to us [and] I think our guys are good guys. You guys that interact with them [see that], we have good people. They’re out there interacting and building relationships. We’re an advocate for them being our biggest reason that people come out and watch the games. Everyone wants that. We talk behind closed doors about doing your part and I think that they do.”

"Our staff and I have made it a point to try and build relationships with the student body. I'm glad for all the people that show up, but our students have been over the top with their consistency. They're getting into the game. Before the game, I had talked to Neil Price and he said, "The Hump needs to do what it does today" and it did. Certainly, our defense helped, but it was rocking there for a while. We had some big runs, and they had to call timeouts because of it. They were a reason why they were a little bit off shooting the basketball tonight."

***Q: What is it like to see Tyler Stevenson come into form and be engaged in these games?***

**CJ:** "He's played really well for us. He's given us that spark. We talked about Shak [Shakeel Moore] coming off the bench earlier and giving us a spark. Now, he's a starter. Tyler has almost assumed that role, not that we could've predicted that. He obviously didn't play as well in the fall, and I knew he could make shots for us. You can see he can defend and rebound and compete at a high level. When you miss shots like that, it's real easy to lose your confidence, but he's playing with his confidence now."

"I couldn't be happier for him. He's obviously a local kid that is living out somewhat of a dream to play for Mississippi State, a team that he grew up watching. He was having a great career at Southern Miss, in our state, and he was able to come back for one year. Now, for him to be so happy, he's not a kid that smiles a ton, but he does when he makes the big plays. He lets his emotions out, and I love seeing him when he does that."

***Q: What have you thought about Tolu Smith's and the team's performance from the free throw line?***

**CJ:** "It's a good decision, right? He's gotten better. Again, I don't want to sound like a broken record, but Tolu deserves everything that he gets. He is as hard a worker as I've ever been around, and that's some tall corn. I've coached for 31 years, coached some unbelievable players, but I did say as hard a worker as anyone. He spends time on his craft. He cares about his craft. He cares about his individual and team productivity."

"When he's not in the game, he's as good as we have in terms of being vocal on the bench. When you get a guy of that stature that's about the team and not worried about him not being on the floor for whatever reason [and] is willing to do that, that's special. That doesn't happen that often, and that's really special. I'm real proud of him. But I'm telling you, he's put in hours and hours on his free throw stroke and his game, and it's paying off for him."

**Forwards Tolu Smith and Tyler Stevenson**

***Q: Tolu, can you talk about the defense you guys had tonight?***

**TS:** "I think the coaches did great with the scout. We had a great game plan containing certain players like Kobe Brown. Like I said, he's playing the best out of anybody in the SEC right now. We did a great job of containing him. A lot of players, guys like Tyler [Stevenson and Cam [Cameron Matthews], stepped up and accepted the role."

***Q: Tyler, you had the alley-oop late in the game that almost put the game away. What was it like seeing that crowd reaction and come full circle for you coming to Mississippi State and having a moment like that.***

**TS:** "I just like bringing the excitement because I know when the fans do it, it helps us out. So, when the crowd gets into it like that, it's going to give us some juice to go out there and play harder for them."

***Q: Tolu, in the last seven games, you went 29 for 44 from the free throw line. You doubled your production there. What's been the key for you there? Has it been you getting confidence and staying in the gym. What's been the biggest thing for you to getting that success?***

**TS:** "[It's] Just staying consistent and staying in the gym; getting shots with Coach Miller and Coach Jans and still trying to perfect the shot. Also, just trying to hold my follow through."

***Q: Tolu, you've had a 25+ average in points the two last home games. What do you think is the difference?***

**TS:** "I just know that we're getting in the home stretch of this thing. We've got goals we're trying to reach. We are trying to get to the tournament. So, it's just whatever it takes. If that means I score 20 points or 0 points, as long as we get the win."

### **Missouri Head Coach Dennis Gates**

***Q: What was the cause of some of those shooting issues, or was it just missed shots?***

**DG:** "No, I don't look at it as shooting issues, I think it was a very physical game, and I don't think the free throw count for both teams [was accurate]. It should've 30 plus for both teams tonight without a doubt in my mind. Physically, our game was lower, and our free throw count was lower. I thought there were situations that we should have got to the paint, but we settled. I think one of them was [DeAndre] Gholston's jump shot but also several of those jump shots we could've drawn foul but because we weren't. We just ended up taking those shots which were shots we would normally make."

***Q: Your rotations were a little different tonight, did you feel like this was a game where you needed to change things up?***

**DG:** "Yeah, I knew what type of game it would be. So, in preparation, I thought those guys would be prepared to do certain things. Obviously, the outcome didn't give us that, but I did see some positives inside the game. Ultimately, we've got to take care of the ball. If you look throughout the game, all our primary ball holders had turnovers. The ones that didn't were Kobe [Brown], Noah [Carter], and D'Moi [Hodge]. We can't play games like that. We're a team that has a positive assist-to-turnover ratio. I would rather have those five possessions back. Then, it's a completely different game if we just had five possessions and an even assist-to-turnover ratio. Ultimately [with] the rotations I wanted to go with Sean [East II] because I knew ultimately what they would do and that was trying to stop us. I wanted more penetration, and Sean gave us that."

***Q: What did Tolu Smith do well for them tonight?***

**DG:** "He finished through contact. I thought he finished through contact well. He drew fouls. The first five minutes of the game, he had eight free throw attempts. He was 3-for-4 from the field as well. He drew contact. I think he does a great job of sealing and getting positioning. I think he's one of the top post players in the country. He didn't get credit for it, because in our conference you have Colin Castleton and Oscar Tshiebwe. When it comes down to centers, I think he's one of the best in the country."

***Q: Is Tolu Smith a type of player that will cause you issues considering the lack of height on your team?***

**DG:** "No, I think being able to draw fouls is where he was elite. He's going to get his baskets here and there. But when you give him both, that's where he's successful, and he does a good job. He ended the game with 25 [points] and 12 [rebounds]. I thought we did a good job, obviously, with the front end of the post and different plays like that. You have to look at how he was able to get them. Most of them were just botched plays or dropoffs in terms of baskets he received."

***Q: With four road losses, how do you get that momentum rolling on the road?***

**DG:** “Ultimately, when you look at road games, you have to look at who we’ve played. I think when you look at Texas A&M and Florida or you look at even tonight, being to play here tonight and the last one at Arkansas. Those are big time teams. Those are NCAA tournament teams in my eyes. I think ultimately our guys played well but not well enough. We didn’t play well enough and play a complete 40 minutes. We’ve got to get to the drawing board to execute. We’ve played on the road, and we’ve won on the road. I’m not looking at it from that perspective. I just think ultimately to be able to completely change a season, you have to be able to do both. Ultimately right now, we’re being able to win somethings at home, but we have to be able to execute on the road too.”

***Missouri Guard Nick Honor***

***Q: What was it about Mississippi State’s defense that made it a little more challenging for you and your teammates tonight?***

**NH:** “I think it was just mental mistakes for us really. We knew it was going to be physical coming in here, but we’ve just got to focus on what we’ve got to focus on. There were a couple calls that didn’t go our way, but it’s an SEC road game. It’s just mental mistakes, and I think we just got to look at them.”