

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

### **Mississippi State vs. No. 9 Tennessee – January 17, 2023**

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

***Q: Another tight game down the stretch, ending on the wrong side. What's the message you try to send to your guys in these close games?***

**CJ:** "We had a couple of stretches where it really hurt us at the end of the first half. The game unfolded exactly the way we needed it to unfold. I feel like a broken record in terms of the score, the possessions and the feel. We were in command. They were having a hard time scoring against us, and the crowd was into the game. Then, we had the [broken] basket deal. It happens all the time, just a little adversity. They [Tennessee] came out of there, and I think it was a 6-0 run from that point of the game. That was a momentum swing for all of us."

"The second half there was back-and-forth. Then, all of a sudden, it was 55-49. It just felt like we got back to three maybe once or twice there, but a lot of credit has to go to Tennessee. They were a couple of men down. It was golden opportunity for our program, and our team this year. It's costly, it's very costly. But man, they've got some winning guys over there. Their point guard, [Zakai] Zeigler, played 40 minutes. You wouldn't have thought he played 40 minutes with how hard he played all the way to the end, just running the team and defending. He just runs the show, and other guys stepped up when they needed them. To go 8-for-9 [on three-point shots] in the second half and 14-15 from the line [for the game]. They did what they had to do to win the game."

***Q: Shakeel Moore had a career high 20 points tonight and seems to give you guys a lift when he's able to have that offensive production. What can you say about what he's doing and how he's fought through those adversities sometimes this year?***

**CJ:** "When he and Dashawn Davis are out there together, it gives us a little more diversity offensively. We can open the floor a little more because we have multiple guys that can get in the paint and create for themselves and for others. He got to the line. He knocked down a couple three's, he's got some wiggle in his game and he's obviously very athletic."

"Again, he's a starter and played 28 minutes. He knows that [he plays starter's minutes], but it's nice being able to have him come in for either guard spot depending on the flow of the game and different foul situations. We need him and others to be consistent with that most nights."

***Q: How big was that 6-0 run at the end of the first half?***

"I thought it was crucial. Like I said, that game was right where we needed it. We were really guarding it. Like all the SEC games we've played, it was a very physical contest. At least four times there in the first half, we got it right to the rim, and there were athletic guys going at it. They won a lot of those confrontations at the rim where we were trying to dunk it. They were pivotal plays. If you make those, who knows how many points you're up, and the crowd gets into it. But you get rejected a couple times, and it just turns the tide. I thought those plays were highly athletic and high-level plays by both guys at the rim. They just won more of those in the first half. I just think it changed the feel at least going into halftime."

***Q: Shak said he didn't feel like the toughness fell in the 40 minutes today. How do you keep the toughness going when the losses start to pile up? What's the message to your defense in practice as you get ready for another game?***

**CJ:** "That's the challenge. That's the last thing I talked to the team about before we left to do our media responsibilities. We're a good basketball team. If we can stick together and stay the course, we'll have opportunities to win games in this league this year."

"You guys that follow us closely know how we've played. Certainly, the one at Tennessee, isn't the one I'm talking about. But the rest of them, we've had opportunities to win those games. It's a big challenge that we all face. It starts with my staff and I to set the vibe, stay hungry, stay focused and just continue to work and believe. We just need to keep believing in one another. We need to believe in what we're doing, and that will be a big focus for us heading into the Florida game."

**Guard Shakeel Moore**

***Q: "Shak, they had eight three-pointers in the second half. and that was kind of the difference. What were you seeing there?"***

**SM:** "I just think we have to stay more together during the final 20 minutes. [We've] Just got to stay tight, got to stay locked in and I feel like we kind of got on our heels a bit."

***Q: "The last couple seasons for you guys, you guys have had a lot of games like this that are close, and you come out on the wrong side at the end. What's the message you try to send to keep your head up as you get into the last seconds of the game?"***

**SM:** "I would just say staying together, staying with each other and trusting one another. Our coaches and team are going to continue fighting. It's not a lack of fight, it's not that. I think we're a good basketball team. I just think we have got to stay the course."

***Q: "Have you seen improvement from this team in the past few games, particularly on the offensive end?"***

**SM:** "I have. We work really hard towards it in practice. We compete, and we have a competitive culture here. I just feel like there's always room for improvement."

***Q: "How do you feel like you attacked the game today?"***

**SM:** "[I was] Just playing free and was able to get to my spots. [I want to] Make teammates better and make some plays for myself. I was just in attack mode and was playing aggressive."

**Tennessee Head Coach Rick Barnes**

***Q: What changed for you in the second half?***

**RB:** "One, I would say this. That's a great team character win for our team. The fact that we had two starters out [Santiago Vescovi and Tyreke Key] and were starting the game with a lineup that's never practiced together ... After the eight-minute mark, I thought Zakai [Zeigler] just really settled down and played terrific basketball. He went 40 minutes the way he did. Coming off, he got aggressive. The way we ended the first half was huge, that we were able to tie the game back up right there."

"We told our team, and I think our team coming in, had great respect for Mississippi State. Other than our game, which you guys know, that night we could've probably beaten anybody in the country. A three-pointer here, a free throw here and our guys knew that it was going to be a real battle. I thought they played their hearts out tonight. Once we settled in [after] too many turnovers, Julian [Phillips] had a great night. We told him he was going to have to get more aggressive, and he did."

"Our post guys, nine blocks, huge. The fact that Zakai, again, went 40 minutes is something. And Josiah [-Jordan James] you can't say enough about him being out there. He got tired, and I thought he really showed some great cardio toughness. I really did. And then, obviously, we started making some shots in the second half. But it was the kind of game, we expected it to be a hard-fought game, and it was."

***Q: What did you learn about Julian [Phillips] in the second half?***

**RB:** “Well, we’ve told him that when he’s aggressive and doing what he can do. We told him, we said ‘You’ve got to get aggressive, you’ve got to shoot the ball.’ He’s rebounding the ball. He’s still learning how to play defense the way he knows he needs to, but we need him to be a guy out there. Again, I thought early in the game when we were turning the ball over, we’re putting it all on Zakai where we turned down some shots. I finally told him, I said ‘I’d rather shoot 10 long threes than turn the ball over.’ I said, ‘Just shoot it, and let’s go get it.’

“Julian, he worked. He scored at about every level you could score. The way he attacked and went at it tonight. I thought Olivier [Nkamhoua] came back and bounced back his rebounds. Our post guys, I mean, nine blocks as a team, that you know that they’re going at the rim every chance they get. Really, just a great team win for us.”

***Q: How valuable is it for Julian to have a guy like Josiah-Jordan James out there?***

**RB:** “I think it’s important because Josiah talks. Again, I’m as impressed as anybody to go from. I don’t know if he’s played 20 minutes in, what, a year? And you go out and you grind through it. I told him. I said, ‘Hey, we’ll try to give you some rest, just tell me. I could tell he was tired, but again, his cardio and his toughness, that’s him. We talked about it before the game. If we’re the team that we say we are and we’re the program we say we are, this is going to be a character game. We’re going to see if we can answer the bell. Because we know, out of the respect that we have for Mississippi State, that they’re going to bring it. They came hard. It was really a big win for us.”

***Forward Julian Phillips***

***Q: What changed for you coming out of halftime?***

**JP:** “I just tried to be more aggressive, find my shots and rebound the ball better because that [makes] better looks as well. [I was] just trying to turn up my aggression.”

***Q: Is that something you needed to do because you were shorthanded, or you wanted to do after [losing to Kentucky] Saturday?***

**JP:** “Both. Obviously, we didn’t have Santi [Santiago Vescovi] or Tyreke [Key], our two good scorers. So, we were missing some points there. Everybody had to step up, next man up. For myself, I just wanted to be more aggressive.”

***Q: Did you see anything that helped Zakai [Zeigler] with his turnaround?***

**JP:** “That’s just who he is. He doesn’t quit, no matter how the game goes. Obviously, you can’t be perfect in any game you play. So, just not being down on yourself and continuing to stay aggressive. Good things will come out of that just like how he did, and he had a great performance.”

***Q: How big was his confidence?***

**JP:** “[It was] Big, and it rubbed off on everybody. Everybody contributes well when he’s playing at his highest like that and is really confident. It just makes a team a lot better.”

***Q: What went well for you motor-wise?***

**JP:** “[I was] Just trying to keep going, trying to stay on the rebounds. To shoot the ball when I’m open and play defense. I was just trying to focus on everything I could, trying to do it at the highest level I can.”