

2022-23 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes Mississippi State vs. Ole Miss – January 7, 2023

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: What are your thoughts on Will McNair Jr. and his performance?

CJ: “Obviously, I’m very familiar with Will and what he’s capable of. He’s one of our vocal leaders on a daily basis in terms of helping people get in the right spots. Like the majority of college basketball players, he wants more on gameday. He wants more minutes. We’re at a point now where if a guy plays 25, they want 32. If a guy plays 30, they want 36. That’s ok, and I understand how it works. Will wants more. I tell all our guys around here, ‘You will always have opportunities’. If you work hard every day, they will present themselves. When they do, you better be ready and take advantage of it. When you produce, you will get more minutes. It was nice to have him when Tolu [Smith] was plagued with the foul issues. He stepped up, played like a veteran and helped us win the game.”

Q: What are your thoughts on that offensive run in the second half and getting the win today in this big game?

CJ: “When they flipped the script on us and we were down seven, it felt like hours. It wasn’t that long because we obviously had a great response. The air was out of the building there for a second, but fortunately we made some plays and stuck together. Before you knew it, we were up six or seven. Obviously, that was a big part of the game, and I thought that our guys handled it well. Obviously, it’s a little easier to handle when you’re at home and playing in front of your home crowd, but I’m certainly glad they did.”

Q: Coach Davis said that your team out toughed his team over the last 12 minutes. How proud are you of the toughness from this team down the stretch?

CJ: “I don’t know if we out toughed them, but I appreciate him [Kermit Davis] saying that. Our backs were against the wall, and we had to win. Plain and simple, I think everyone that follows us closely knew where we were at. We had lost three in a row and were 0-2 [in SEC play] out of the gate. We had already lost a home game. Now, we have our rivals coming in. There was a lot of buildup to this game for all of us. People asked me a lot prior to the game, ‘How do you handle the rivalry games?’ Certainly, everyone knows, and everyone knew where we were at. We didn’t need to talk about it that much. It was obvious. I don’t know how tough they were all the time, but they stuck together. They stuck together when things weren’t going our way. The bench was really good, and the huddles were good. Finally, we got on that run and were able to hold them off.”

Q: What are your overall thoughts about your first rivalry game, and how your team responded in the second half?

CJ: “I’m not going to act like I wasn’t concerned. If we lost this game, we’d be 0-3 [in the SEC], and we have got to go on the road to play Georgia and Auburn. Then, we have got to come back and play Tennessee. It’s one game at a time, but we’re human. We know what’s waiting for us. I didn’t tell the team that, but in my mind, it was a must win. We had to have it for all of us. Being a new coach, for our fanbase continuing to support the way they have been supporting us, the crowd was off the charts. It was against Alabama too, but we didn’t give them much to cheer about in the second half. Fortunately, we did tonight. They were awesome. You can feel the energy. They helped us, and they made them call timeouts. It was a big difference on why we were able to go on the longer run as we were.”

Q: What are your thoughts on Eric Reed Jr. on the glass, especially on the offense end?

CJ: "He was huge, Eric was huge. He's willed himself to be a really good offensive rebounder. He's not a great athlete for this level. He is just a tough, accountable, dependable, everyday guy, and it fuels us. They [the players] love it when he flies in there amongst the trees and rips it out of the air. It's just an everyday thing that he does. He's gotten to the point where we rely on him. We need him to make those kinds of plays. It just becomes contagious. If he's doing it, we're talking to the other guys and telling them to join the party and get in there too. Eric, in particular, was 3-for-9, but he hit the big three. More importantly, he guarded [Matthew] Murrell most of the night. He chased him and chased him. He did a good job of contesting him most of the night and had the huge offensive rebounds."

Q: Tolu Smith reached 1,000 career points today. Can you talk about him and the kind of teammate he has been since you have gotten here?

CJ: "I didn't realize that. That's a great milestone for Tolu, I'm extremely happy for him. He works so hard on his game that we have to tell him to get off his feet. I'll tell him on the weekends that he has a minute restriction. You can't be on the floor more than 30 or 40 minutes on our off days. He has to get off his feet and relax because of his [injury] history."

"He cares so much, and he's developed into an emerging leader with the rest of his teammates. Because he works so hard on a daily basis, he has earned that right. He's a wonderful human being. He stuck with us. He was as vocal as anybody was on the bench even though he wasn't out there like he wanted to be. Even though he only had 15 minutes, he still had 12 points and five rebounds. He handled their double team for the most part, and I'm really happy for him."

Forwards Will McNair Jr. and Tolu Smith

Q: Ole Miss was up 38 to 31 and you guys went on a 26-8 run, what kind of change was there?

WM: "Defense – we had to pick it up on defense and get some stops in a row. That motivated our offense for sure."

Q: Tolu, you had a pretty good game when you weren't in foul trouble. What was Ole Miss doing against you defensively?

TS: "They kind of switched it up a little bit. They started doubling off the four-man at first. Then, in the second half, they just played solo. So, I just had to make the right read and play."

Q: You guys had been struggling a little bit offensively and then made six shots in a row to get into the lead. How much confidence does that give you guys on the offensive end?

WM: [It helped] A lot. Going down the stretch, we need that for sure."

Q: Will, I saw after the game Coach Jans walked up to you mid court, and said something to you after you stepped up today when Tolu had some foul trouble. What did he say to you?

WM: "He said we're back, and that it felt good to get back in that win column."

Q: Will, how did it feel to help step up when your team needed you to get that first SEC win?

WM: "It felt good that my team trusted me with the ball. I felt like I could make the right play to win."

Q: Tolu, you reached a personal milestone, 1,000 career points while at home and against a rival as well. How did that make you feel?

TS: "It's a good feeling man. I'm just excited we got a win honestly. We had a little stretch right there. So, it feels good to win."

Q: This offense is not built around the 3-point shot, but your team hit a few key ones in the second half. How much confidence does it give to know you can make those shots when they are there?

WM: “We have confidence that we can make them. We just sometimes struggle with it. Today, we made them. That was a good sign.”

Q: Tolu, what did it feel like to see your teammate and brother step up when you were little bit of foul trouble to help the team win?

TS: “I was probably his biggest fan out there. I was excited just watching from the sidelines. If you saw my reaction, I was just going crazy. Like I said, I was just excited to see Will do what he knows he can do. He came in and stepped up for me and for the team. It’s just a great feeling to win. Thanks, Will.”

Ole Miss Head Coach Kermit Davis

Opening Statement

KD: “Give Mississippi State a lot of credit. [It] Hurts my soul to say it, but they just absolutely out toughed us [for] the last 12 minutes. [They] Got every 50-50 ball, beat us off the offensive rebounds, off the free throws – just careless turnovers at the end, but give them credit. We were up seven with 12 [minutes] to go, and it’s like we couldn’t get to a media timeout. [Mississippi State] Played right through it, through fatigue. [It] Seemed like we got tired. We flipped the game in about a three or four-minute period. Then, we came back and had a wide-open layup to cut [the lead] to two [points]. Instead of making a physical layup, we tried to avoid contact, but give them credit. I thought their team, the last 12 minutes, just out toughed our team. That’s all there is to it. They beat us to 50-50 balls, and they outrebounded us. Every hustle play, they made. That’s just the difference in a rivalry game, and it’s too bad for our team that that showed up today.”

Q: Where did you see some of those defensive breakdowns in the second half?

KD: “It’s offensive rebounding. I mean, [Eric] Reed [Jr.], the guard just went back and got rebounds. Myles [Burns] has inside position, and he pops right over the top of him. They just went and chased 50-50 balls. I mean, they beat us badly in the 50-50-ball game. In the first half, our first-shot defense was unbelievable. It was just their offensive rebounds and 50-50 balls, or we could’ve been up, even struggling to score against their good defense. So, that was just it. We had some really good possessions of guarding in 13 [defense], fouling late in the clock. I thought we guarded well. We turned it over. It’s hard to guard a turnover, and that’s what was happening. That’s how they turned the game out.”

Q: What’s the message to your team after this game?

KD: “It wasn’t pretty, because this is hard when you’ve been in this rivalry for a long time. I’ve been in this rivalry for 59 years, I’m 63, and I remember when I was four years old. This rivalry means a lot to me. I’ve been on both sides of it. When you get in a rivalry game, there’s a lot of things that happen in rivalry games. When you leave a gymnasium and you think that the other team was tougher than you and that’s the reason you lost, that is really hard to take, That’s the way I feel right now. That’s the message to the team. We’ll get through it. We’ll get back in the morning, watch tape and get ready for a really good Auburn team on Tuesday. So, we’ll go next play, but that’s exactly what the message was. Our guys— [Matthew Murrell] know it. Some of our younger guys don’t know it, but Matt knows it. Matt’s been through it.”

Guard Matthew Murrell

Q: Where are you at mentally with everything going on, and where's the team at?

MM: "I'm just trying to stay level-headed. Being one of the leaders on the team, I have to always remain positive because the guys are always going to look towards me when things get wrong. I can't come in the locker room in a bad mood [and] down. Because then, it's going to reflect on the team. When everyone gets down in a bad mood, that just makes it worse. So, I just stay positive, be encouraging to my teammates and tell them how to build on this and move on to the next game."

Q: What did you see in late run that allowed State to run away with it?

MM: "Just like Coach [Kermit Davis] said, just offensive rebounding and toughness plays. We were getting inside position, but they were rebounding over the top of us. That was really the biggest thing. That's why they made that run."