

**2022-23 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes**  
**Mississippi State vs. No. 4 Alabama – March 10, 2023**  
**SEC Tournament – Quarterfinals**

**Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans**

**Q: Opening Statement**

**CJ:** "Tough day, we're best when we get off to a really good start. Obviously, we didn't. They had great energy out of the locker room, kind of punched us in the face. We were playing from behind, playing uphill all night long. We just couldn't find ourselves to legitimately get back in the game."

**Q: Do you think there was any sort of fatigue that set having to play overtime yesterday?**

**CJ:** "I mean, obviously it would be, but we can't use that as an excuse. We knew that coming in. We're going to have to play multiple games back-to-back. It's not just us doing this. It's more than one team doing that kind of thing. Yeah, there was fatigue, but, I mean, you just got to play through it."

**Q: When you look at your résumé, body of work from this year, do you feel like you deserve a spot in the NCAA tournament?**

**CJ:** "Again, it's out of our control now. That's been a mantra that we've had for a few weeks, to be honest. We felt like we were in position to control the outcome of being selected or not, just like you have a lot to do with the outcome of each and every game. Now, it's sit and wait. That's the situation we're in."

"But, yeah, I personally think that we should be selected, of course. I mean, I coach this team, I know how tough they are. We got I think eight quad one and quad two wins. ... The thing that I've loved about this team all year long is we got a bunch of wins away from home. We're not one of those teams that has a great – we have a great home-court advantage, but we're not one of those teams that just won all of them at home and survived on the road one or two. We won a bunch of games. Obviously, that's where the NCAA Tournament games are played, away from your home site. We'll see, time will tell. Certainly, going to be a long weekend sitting around and waiting.

**Q: What level of fear is there with how hard you push the team, and what is the mindset like as a coach at that time? Looking back on it now, pressed the right buttons, it seems.**

**CJ:** "Yeah, I mean, I talked about it locally when we were going through it. Then, when we got to the other side of how impressed I was during that time with was their mental approach. That's the time when you got a new coach, in most cases doesn't matter if he's new or not, you start questioning everything. It's just human nature for the players to question themselves, the players to question each other. The players can certainly question a new coach and lose belief. I didn't sense any of that when we were losing those games. We kept talking about staying the course. We'll reap the dividends later, and they did."

"Coaching for 31 years, you have a lot of moments and stretches where you're really proud of your team. But that's as proud as I can remember being for a group of guys that stuck with the process. That phrase is thrown around a lot. But when you're 1-7 in the SEC, to climb your way out of that, put yourself in position that we are in now, it's pretty impressive for these young men. Says a lot about who they are. Says a lot about who they're going to be when they're done playing college basketball. I'm super proud of them."

***Q: You had a chance to see Alabama three times. What has impressed you with them as they have evolved?***

**CJ:** "There's no shame in getting beat by Alabama. I mean, that's what I told our guys. They have a tremendous basketball team. They have got a great talent, got a great coach and a great coaching staff. There's a reason they've been ranked in the top five, top 10 all year long. They're just so dynamic. They're so explosive. They have a lot of confidence in their system. They believe in what they're doing. It's obvious to everybody that watches them that has a clue, they're shooting three's and getting to the rim. That's kind of what they built their program on. They've recruited to that system. They're just really, really good."

"They're a team, in my opinion, that can obviously play with a lead, and they don't hold back. They keep doing what they do. You would imagine if they get in tough spots that they can get themselves back in the game because of the three-point proficiency and how many guys on the court can shoot the ball. They got great rim protection. We struggled, obviously, especially early. We got the ball kind of where we wanted to, but you knew it would be difficult because of their length and the shielding that they do. Didn't matter who it was, we just really, really had a hard time finishing at the rim. But a lot of credit needs to go to their defense and their individual players. They're obviously a really good basketball team."

***Q: Having coached NCAA tournament teams in the past, how much have you seen with other teams the experience from those non-conference invitationals and tournaments pay off when you get to the structure of March Madness?***

**CJ:** "It helps just with the routine of the turnarounds, understanding what's at stake. Certainly, playing in this tournament with the stage of the SEC Tournament, the lights are a little brighter. I think that helps if you're chosen to play in the NCAA Tournament. You can't teach experience. We've had some success with that. Obviously, played in Florida in the fall, and we beat Marquette and Utah. Marquette has gone on to have an unbelievable season. It goes back to what I said earlier. We had so many good wins, and the majority of them have been away from home with some high-level teams."

"If you really look at it, we have zero bad losses. Georgia is our only quad 3, quad 4 loss. You know how this goes. Georgia was playing much better. I like Mike White. He would tell you the same. They just beat Auburn. It was a close game. We didn't get it done. Then, their numbers dissipated. They went from a quad two to quad three loss. On the road against Georgia is certainly not a bad loss."

***Q: It seems like shooting struggles have kind of persisted throughout the season. What do you think wasn't working for you, and was it the defense that Alabama was showing you?***

**CJ:** "Yeah, obviously, we haven't been a great shooting team especially from three all year long. We've had our struggles at the free-throw line, as well. I was just always hoping that we'd catch fire at some point and just change it. As a coach, you just hope they find that rhythm and that confidence. We shoot the ball better in practice for whatever than we do in games. Tonight, I don't know. I can't get inside their heads, but we struggled early finishing at the rim. Their length, their rotations were on-point. We had a hard time getting off clean looks. They've got big guys all over the court, obviously at the four and five. They give a lot of people problems with that."

**Forward Tolu Smith**

***Q: Tolu, what would you say to folks who are looking at your résumé and trying to decide whether or not Mississippi State is an NCAA Tournament team?***

**TS:** "I personally say for me, I think we have a really good résumé. I think we have some really good wins early in the season, even late in the season. I think we had a well-rounded season, but it's not for me to decide. It's for the guys on the panel. We're just going to wait till Selection Sunday."

***Q: Obviously you've talked all season about you wanted to come back to have a chance to go March Madness. You said you feel like you have a pretty good résumé. What would it mean to you in the last year to have that opportunity?***

**TS:** "It would mean the world to me. It would mean the world to me, not just myself, but my teammates and my coaches who did a tremendous job of coaching us from the start of the season until the end. Just having that great feeling that we will get in the tournament."

***Q: How much do you think the experience of this week with the quick turnaround, the non-conference play you had in Florida, can help you get to the NCAA Tournament?***

**TS:** "Yeah, I think it's good for us. Different environments, different types of situations, different tournaments and scenarios. We played it all. We done it all. I think it's going to help us."

***Q: You guys had three tough games with Alabama. You scored in the 60s the first two. What did they do different defensively to limit you on offense today?***

**TS:** "It was a lot. They got out early, got out fast, punched us in the mouth early like Coach said. We were just clawing back the whole game. I think we cut it to like 14 at one point. We just couldn't convert."

***Q: I know you've been dealing with some free throw struggles in the season. Almost a perfect day today. What was working for you?***

**TS:** "No, I do the same routine before every game. I come out, and I shoot with KeShawn Murphy. We play this little free throw game. We just do that before every game. I guess today I was just feeling it."

***Q: How were you able to be at your best over these last several weeks?***

**TS:** "Man, it's a lot. Personally, I'd say God. God helped me through a lot of things, even all the adversities that I've been through. My teammates, my coaching staff, I think everybody did a great job of going back to the drawing board, just figure out what we need to do. I think we did a great job of doing that. We had a tough stint early on in the conference play. We did a great job of overcoming all that."

***Q: The way you guys have responded since the slow start, how much confidence or momentum do you feel this program has going into next week?***

**TS:** "Man, it's everything. I think there's no team that we can't beat in the country, honestly. I think we got a great shot at anybody. We're going to give everybody our best. It's going to be hard. I don't think anybody wants to play us really."

## **Alabama Head Coach Nate Oats**

### ***Q: Opening Statement***

**NO:** "It was a good start to the tournament. We obviously didn't play very well last time we were out at A&M. So, we needed to bounce back. We've bounced back off of losses pretty well all year. I think margin of victory after a loss is 20-plus. We did that again today."

"The question is can we continue to play like this for the next two days. But I thought our guys were very focused. They were really into the defensive end, which is what we needed to be. We made a change in the lineup, obviously. Took our Sixth Man of the Year in the SEC [Jahvon Quinerly] and put him in the starting lineup. I just thought we were struggling offensively to start games. We get to the end of the four-minute media timeout, have two points, three points. Today, we started 13-6. So, it made sense."

"I thought Jaden Bradley played well in his minutes, too. Wasn't necessarily a demotion of Jaden, because Jaden came to me last night and said he thought I should start Jahvon. That's the kind of group we have. Guys are willing to do whatever they need to do to help the team be better. Me and JQ and Jaden Bradley sat down, had a discussion. I think it's better when [Noah] Clowney is at the five, Brandon [Miller] is at the four, there's more shooting on the floor. When Jaden is in, you can play to his strengths, get the ball downhill a little bit, when there's a stretch five in there. Wasn't that we were displeased with Jaden or anything, I just thought it made sense, and it worked well today."

"I thought our guys did a good job opening the game. I thought we did a good job closing the half. I think over the final 12 minutes of the first half, they were 3-for-19. We went into the half great. Start of the second half wasn't that good. Tolu Smith got off a little bit. Then, we hung around 20. Hoping not to play the starters after the first four minutes of the second half. We had to bring them in. They did a good job of opening it back up. The back-to-back threes, Clowney was able to hit the one."

"Noah Gurley is a guy as a senior, we talked about his leadership all year. I think you see it. For a guy to have some DNPs late in the year for a fifth-year senior, that was a big contributor, started a lot of games last year. To come in and have himself mentally ready to go. This is a team that plays big. Cameron Matthews is more traditional four man. We decided to go bigger with Gurley at the four more often. Had great practices, he was ready to go. I think he embodies our team, to be honest with you. Unbelievable culture of guys just caring about their teammates. He's continued to lead, never pouted. We needed him today."

"Our second leading scorer, Mark Sears, struggled to shoot the ball today. Don't expect that shooting the next two days. But we needed somebody to step up. A season-high of 20 assists, which is the second most ever in the SEC Tournament for Alabama basketball. Our guys are unselfish, they move the ball, they care about each other. Only had seven turnovers. I thought our guards did a great job of taking care of the ball."

"Lastly, it was Charles' birthday today. Our guys are great. They gave him a big, huge birthday celebration this morning, sang to him. Five birthday blocks. I thought he controlled the paint pretty well. He won the hardhat for all the blue-collar points. A lot of guys stepped up and contributed. Proud of our team. Got one down. We've been here in Nashville before. It's going to be a fun tournament. Whoever we end up playing, it's going to be a tough game tomorrow."

***Q: That was a team that was 23rd in turnover percentage defense. You only had seven. What do you think was key? How important was it that this first game?***

**NO:** "Oh, it's big. We've been talking about getting better starts. I set in the hotel room with our starting group before the A&M game, talked about what we need to do. That's why I was so moved, pleased with Jaden Bradley. He came to me and said, Coach, I think Jahvon Quinerly should start. I've talked to him about different lineups that maybe fit him a little better. So just such an unselfish group. They really want to do what's best for the team all the time. I think Jahvon has been playing really well. Gives us a little bit more shooting when teams can't sag quite as much. It wasn't just Jahvon inserted for Jaden. It was more the whole team. We got to get stops, run off our stops. Only having seven turnovers is big because even when you don't shoot it particularly well, we didn't shoot it bad, 35 percent is not bad, but that was bolstered by Gurley's three of four, Dom Welch's one of one. The rest of the team that typically shot it well for us all year, you take those guys out, didn't shoot it great. Didn't turn it over, rebounded it enough. A decent offensive game against a good defensive team."

***Q: You talked about the starters wanting to get them a break in the second half. How valuable was it for them to get some rest today, but also for some of the backups to get some post-season experience in this first game today? And then, on the line of backups, do you have an update on Dom Welch?***

**NO:** "We've played these tournaments before where we get to play three straight games. Mississippi State had to go to overtime yesterday. So, they had to play their starters extra minutes. I was hoping after we pull our starters after the first four minutes of the second half that we would only have to play them very limited. We were able to do that. I think we just had to put them in there when it got cut to 14, move it back up to 20. I really wanted to see some bench guys play well."

"That Nimari Burnett has huge upside. I wanted to see him. He hit the one three. He drove it, got a layup. Thought he was pretty good in his minutes. Would have liked to see Rylan make a few shots, get his confidence back. But Noah Gurley was great. I think we can insert him in any of the next two games. He has the confidence to know he's playing well."

"Dom Welch, I thought he was good. Different kind of guys we can play in different situations. But Dom has got a tailbone bruise, so a big-time play taking that charge. Unfortunate that Nimari fouled the guy from behind, would have been a great charge. Embodies what we're about, a kid comes off the bench and gives his body up for the betterment of the team. Hopefully, he can get some treatment and rehab and be ready to go. He's been playing well, practicing hard."

***Guard Jahvon Quinerly and Forward Brandon Miller***

***Q: How happy were you guys to see Charles get 11 points, six rebounds and five blocks today?***

**BM:** "I feel like as a team we're happy for him. He turned 21. I feel like my vocals were the best out of the group with singing, but not going to get into that (smiling). No, I think we're all happy for him."

***Q: Brandon and JQ, turnovers were so low, I think one of the lowest of the season. That's been a problem recently. How did you limit that?***

**JQ:** "I had three today. I got to be better on my part with the turnovers. But it was good to have single-digit turnovers in this game. I think that really had our offense flowing."

**BM:** "I feel like us limiting turnovers is just another way to win games. When our offense is not working or if we're not getting stops, I feel like that's just another way to win the game."

***Q: Jahvon, in the last month or so, you got a step of quickness back. When did you really start feeling like yourself?***

**JQ:** "I think it was just a mindset change. Earlier in the year I was kind of in my head. It was a long, long journey coming back. This last month or so, I've kind of been out there playing, trying to forget about the injury, like I'm just hooping. I think it's starting to show."

***Q: Jahvon, when Coach was talking about Jaden coming in, saying you should be in the starting lineup, what does that mean to you? How have you seen him mature to come to that decision?***

**JQ:** "Man, it's just the culture we have here. Time and time again. Two years ago, that was the culture with that team. You recognize that somebody's getting it going, a couple games in, you're like, Look, Coach, we might have to make a change or something. That's just, man, crazy. That's really something that we've embodied as a program since I've gone to Alabama. I don't know any other program in the country that will really do that. I'm happy for Jaden. He showed a lot with that yesterday. I'm not surprised at all."