

2022-23 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Quotes NCAA Tournament Selection Show – March 12, 2023

Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: What are your first thoughts when you saw Mississippi State pop-up on the screen?

CJ: “Excitement, we’re going dancing. That was the ultimate goal that we’ve had since we’ve arrived. It’s something we’ve talked about from day one. It wasn’t about trying to build a program. It was about building a team each and every year with a goal of playing in the NCAA Tournament. Certainly, back then, it sounded good. How realistic was it for most people, who knows? I know the people in our room believed in it. They worked their tail off. Now, they’re rewarded for playing in the greatest show on earth.”

Q: What are your initial impressions of Pittsburgh as a team?

CJ: “I’ve done zero scouting. I just left the reception that we had for the guys and some staff people. Certainly, I know who Pittsburgh is, and I have a lot of respect for Coach Capel. They’ve had a tremendous year. I think they’ve won 13 or 14 games in the ACC. They’ll be excited and trying to play their best, but I don’t know much about them yet.”

Q: What does it mean for veteran guys like Shakeel Moore, D.J. Jeffries, Cameron Matthews and Tolu Smith who don’t have NCAA experience to come back and get this moment?

CJ: “Well, that was one of the selling points was when we arrived. We weren’t trying to be a year two or year three, we were trying to win in year one. I needed them to believe in what we were trying to tell them. It’s easy to say, but obviously hard to do. I’m extremely excited for all of our players. I tell everybody that it’s a shame that all college basketball players don’t get to participate in March Madness, because there’s nothing like it ... You have life memories forever.”

“It’s just different. The stage is bigger. The lights are brighter. Everyone in the country and the casual fan is paying attention. I’m just so excited for all the guys. Obviously, the ones you mentioned that stuck with us that we inherited. All the players that are on this team are going to be able to have this time in their lives. “

Q: Will McNair is experienced in March Madness. How are you looking to him to lead them through an experience that most of these guys haven’t had yet?

CJ: “I don’t think I will have to say anything to Will. Will likes to talk and fashions himself as one of the leaders. I’m sure he’ll be talking about the experience that he’s had with us. I’m sure that’ll be something that some of the guys will lean on a little bit.”

Q: What’s been the schedule coming back from Nashville ,and what’s your schedule heading forward moving to Dayton?

CJ: “We gave them off yesterday, a well-deserved [off day]. Today, we got together at 2 p.m. prior to the show and practiced. We just had a normal practice. Basically, not knowing exactly if you’re going to play Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. You just have to have a routine practice with no opponent to scout for. Which ever since November, this hasn’t been the case. You’ve basically been in scout mode practice all year long except for a few days after the Christmas break.”

Q: Talk about the pluses and minuses of being in that NCAA First Four?

CJ: "It's rushed. You don't have a lot of time to soak it in. You've got to get into scout mode immediately, and that's the case for everyone though. When you get your name called, people are scurrying around and gathering as much information as they can. It's fun to be a part of it. When you know you're going to play earlier than everyone else, you just feel a little more rushed, borderline panicked if you will."

"Certainly, you'd rather be playing not in Dayton in an ideal world. The one positive is everyone in the country is going to watch you play. That's what I've told the guys already. You're going to have the biggest stages you've ever had, because we are going to be the only tournament game going on. It's not like on Thursday and Friday when there's going to be 16 games going on throughout the day and people are going to be going back and forth. That'll be apart of our motivation to get them to understand what kind of stage they are going to be playing on."

Q: With the way this team has had to grind out games, how much satisfaction of making it to the NCAA Tournament add to it?

CJ: "It's what I told them, just how happy I am for them because of what they've went through and the belief that they've had in each other. They stuck with the process. All the cliches you can imagine that coaches use, and it came true for them. For all of them, it's been a dream and a goal of theirs. Other than Will [McNair Jr.], they will all be first time participants. I'm so internally happy for all of them and their families. It's something that they can check off they're to-do or bucket list. It'll be a wonderful experience for all of them."

Q: Was there a moment in February and coming down the stretch that you thought that we got a good shot at making it to the NCAA Tournament?

CJ: "I think it's when we beat Arkansas on the road. That was such a big win for our program. We needed that win. I think it really gave all of us confidence that we could do it. That's a good team and a great road environment. We handled ourselves really well."

"The loss at Alabama got us jumpstarted mentality that were a good team. Our record isn't indicative of who we are as a basketball team. I really believe that kind of started it, but the win at Arkansas made it reality that were in this. We've got plenty of opportunities left to increase or resume. They did it. I'm super proud of them and super excited for them."

"I'm excited for Mississippi State. I know it's been once in 13 years. I'm excited to be a part of it, and I hope these fans are rejoicing in it. I hope they're as excited as we are. I know were appreciative of the turnouts that we've had this year. From talking to people, it's been different. I'm glad they're excited about what we're doing."

Q: When you look at what you're trying to build here at Mississippi State, how much does making the tournament and having that premiere slot help your pitch to recruits?

CJ: "Heck yeah, its big-time exposure for our program and for our University. I've been proud of guys and the way they've competed in a first-class manner all year long. We're certainly going to try and be our best whenever we end up playing. Hopefully, we're going to stick around. You have to have the right approach, the right makeup and the right attitude towards this deal. You have to enjoy it, and they should. We have to get back to work here shortly, try to prepare to win the game and have fun while doing it."

Forward Cameron Matthews and Forward Tolu Smith

Q: What was the feeling like to get to March Madness when you saw your name pop up on the screen?

CM: It's a sigh of relief seeing our name get called. I'm just grateful for all my teammates, coaches, and God. Everything just played out the right way."

TS: "Piggy backing off what Cam said, it was a sigh of relief. It's just one check mark off the list. Now, we have to make a run."

Q: Was there a moment in February when you guys thought that you can get to the NCAA Tournament and your confidence got a lot higher?

TS: "I wouldn't say there was a particular game. I would just say during that little stint – we always go back to that stint when we were losing a lot of games in the beginning of the SEC. During that time, we just got a lot closer. I would say for me personally regardless of what was going to happen, that it was just going to come for us. Just stayed praying and stayed working. I thought what we have now was going to happen eventually. God is doing, and we did."

Q: What are your impressions of playing in the NCAA First Four and getting that spotlight all to yourselves?

CM: "I feel like it would have been nice to have a bye, but I'm just grateful to still be in. We got great coaches. So, we're going to wait on them to game prep and get ready for Pitt."

Q: "How much does all the work add to the sigh of relief of being able to get rewarded at the end of the year.

TS: "It means everything. I think we've been through a lot of ups and downs, more than most teams. We've been through all the situations. The tough games and the close games. The not so close games, and everything just made us a better team. We have a lot of experience out of this whole season. I'm just so proud of our guys and our coaching staff overall."

Q: "How much will you and your teammates lean on Will McNair Jr.'s experience in the NCAA Tournament, and how has he pushed you in practice this year?

TS: "Will is like another coach. He thinks he's like an encyclopedia or something. He got the fun facts and always knows everything, not in a bad way but a good way. He has a lot of knowledge of the game. He's been in the [NCAA] Tournament, just having that extra experience of him and a coaching staff that has been in the Tournament is really helpful for us."

Q: "What is it like knowing that your program that everyone is watching, and what would be your pitch to why Chris Jans is the guy that can build this up?

TS: "It's a great feeling to have everybody watching. Why wouldn't you want everybody to watch your game and put Mississippi State [back] on the map? To show everyone what we've been working on and what we can do. As far as recruits, I said it earlier in an interview for the guys who want to work, become better players and want the best for themselves, Chris Jans is the guy. Even the coaching staff, they all want the best out of you on and off the court. For the guys that want that, this is the program for you."