

2022-23 Mississippi State Postgame Quotes Mississippi State vs. Pittsburgh– March 14, 2023

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: Opening Statement

CJ: “Yeah, there was no doubt in our minds that we would fight and scratch and claw, and we did. I think it was 58-52 if I’m not mistaken, and we end up taking the lead. They took it right back. Obviously, we had a couple chances there at the end to win the game, but it didn’t happen.”

Q: What does it mean to you to hear the praise that your players had for the job you did this season and the belief you were able to instill in them when you came in?

CJ: “I mean, what are they going to say? I’m standing right here. I don’t think they have much of a choice but to spin it in a positive way. I told them when we made the tournament in our locker room – congratulations, how proud I was of them. The last thing I told them before we took the floor is congratulations, you’re in March Madness. You’re where every college basketball player yearns to be, and you’ve got a wonderful stage to show everybody what you stand for, both for the front of your jersey and for your back.”

“Certainly, we’re extremely disappointed with the outcome, but those kids when you outrebound someone 49-28, usually you’d expect to win. But you’ve got to give Pitt a lot of credit. They played obviously well enough to win. We just struggled in the first half to guard them. We just couldn’t contain it. They were 8-for-13 from three, and it was still a one-point game. We had eight turnovers, and they had two. Then, in the second half, I think we got up maybe two or three was the most we ever got up. Same for them, I think, for quite a while until with three minutes left, it was six. Then, our guys went on a run and put themselves in position to win the game. It was back-and-forth.”

“I’ll always remember this group for their belief, for their buy-in and for their coachability. I’ve told them that many times throughout the year. I reiterated it in the locker room just now because it’ll be my first group at Mississippi State. We’re proud of our accomplishments this year. Certainly, we want more. We want to be playing on Friday, but it’s not meant to be.”

Q: I know you talked about it's not about building up a program, it's about building a program for that year. When you reflect on that and where you are now, how proud are you of your ability and this team to have done that and gotten to this point?

CJ: “That’s what I told them. Maybe a few people outside of our locker room really believed that we had a chance to play in the NCAA Tournament. And I said, there’s probably people in this locker room that questioned it when we started talking about that when we arrived. So yeah, I mean, first year, that was the goal that we set, and we reached it this year. We’ll see when we get into next year how it’ll go. But it’s a credit to these guys, it really is. Coaches are going to coach and work and plead and try to get the most out of them. But if there’s no buy-in, there’s no belief. Then, it’s not going to happen. Some of it was blind faith. I didn’t have deep-seated relationships with any of these guys when they chose to come back. Then, we added pieces to the puzzle, and we end up having a good year. Something they’ll be proud of the rest of their lives.”

Q: A couple questions about that last shot. Were there other options you were looking at on that play there? And to follow up on that, what's your message to a guy like Shakeel Moore? It was a shot he was hoping to make, but what do you say to a guy like that in that situation?

CJ: “Yeah, there were multiple looks on that play. I think maybe we have run it one time all year long, and there were a couple lob options early. Then, obviously like Rams [Dashawn Davis] said, he found Shak [Shakeel Moore] in the deep drift. There was no one around him for 10, 15 feet. It was a

heck of a look. Fortunately, we got it off quick enough where we had at least one tap at it. I don't think the second one was probably in time. But at that point, it's all you can ask for, a chance -- the ball is in the air, to win an NCAA Tournament game and still have enough time to get a put-back."

"It was a heck of a shot by [Jamarius] Burton there to give them the lead. It was really obviously a great game for the fans, and it was a great environment. Certainly, appreciate all the folks in the Dayton community for coming out and supporting. I know it's a basketball-crazy community. They showed up tonight, and we're appreciative of that."

Q: I know Tolu Smith said that Shakeel Moore's shot wasn't the reason you lost, but when that shot comes out of your hand and doesn't go through the net, it's a lot harder to feel that way yourself. How are you also helping lift him up and the rest of the team?

CJ: "He was the first one into the locker room. All I said was that was a heck of a look. He gets it. I don't think he's going to wear that very long. I think anyone would be disappointed. But we all understand how that works, and it was a heck of a look. I was glad that he had the look. I felt really good when he rose up, and I didn't have a good angle. So, I didn't have to go through the process of understanding whether it was going to go in or not, but he'll be fine."

Q: You've obviously been focused on this game. But with the portal already being open, how quick is your staff going to have to turn around and start preparing for next season?

CJ: "That's already begun. That never ends. Recruiting never ends if you're playing or not. We'll probably obviously have more time to focus on that as we go forward."

Q: Like you said, really big stage tonight. Only game on, everybody is watching. What was it like to put Mississippi State basketball on the map, this being the second tournament appearance in over a decade?

CJ: "Yeah, I don't necessarily believe that we put them on the map, but we reintroduced ourselves to college basketball. Hopefully -- certainly, we've been a team that has struggled shooting the basketball all year long. It was well-documented. I'm sure people that don't know us very well didn't believe it the way we started the game. That was awesome, an awesome way to start. But it feels good. It feels good. I'm happy for our fan base. I know they wanted more. I certainly wanted more. Our players wanted more, but we'll have perspective here real soon. I think we'll all be proud of the accomplishments that this team had and the season that we had. Hopefully, it'll help us going forward."

Q: You mentioned the buy-in from this team, whether it be the belief off the court or the play on the court. How important are guys like Shakeel Moore and Cameron Matthews moving forward now and keeping that foundation, kind of building that culture that you want moving forward at Mississippi State?

CJ: "Yeah, it's more fun in your second year because you've got guys that get it, that understand what they've went through and what lies ahead. So, to be able to have players coming back, to be able to talk to the recruits when they're on campus. Then, when our team eventually arrives to be able to lead them, just get them to understand from a player's perspective the expectations that we have on a daily basis. How we do things in practice, in the weight room, in the classroom and the community. Your first year is always tough because everybody is new regardless if they've played there or not. Hopefully, we'll have a bunch of guys back heading into next season."

Forward Tolu Smith, Forward D.J. Jeffries, Guard Dashawn Davis, Guard Shakeel Moore

Q: Talk about what you saw on that last play, what your initial reads were and when you found Shakeel Moore in the corner?

DD: "Really, I just seen Shak was open. So, I just passed him the ball. It was really simple."

Q: Tolu, as Coach had mentioned, everyone talked about your fight all season. You go down six late. What did this group show one more time making that 7-0 run and put yourself right back in the spot, where after that three, it looked like it would have been dagger?

TS: "Yeah, I'm proud of this team, very proud of this team. We fought, scratched and clawed. We've been through a lot of situations like this. Yeah, I'm just so proud of the team and happy to be a part of this season with these guys."

Q: When you talk about being in this situation, you know this feeling, how important is it to lift each other up and especially lift Shakeel Moore up after that shot?

TS: "Yeah, it's a big thing for us. Team and loving each other is something that we bank on. Shak's shot wasn't the reason why we lost. It was other things that contributed to the loss. We had a great look at the end of the game and just sometimes the cards don't fall in your favor. But I'm so proud of this group. Like I said, I'm so proud of everybody. I'm proud of the coaching staff."

Q: You talked throughout the whole season how badly you wanted to get to March Madness. I know it stings right now, but you had that opportunity. D.J., what did it mean to grind through everything, the highs and lows of the season and have the opportunity to come here and experience this?

DJJ: "Like Tolu said, we've been through a lot of adversity. I couldn't be any more proud of these guys. We've built a brotherhood that's forever going to be a brotherhood. Tonight, we came up short. It's not the result that we wanted, but I'm proud of us. We've been through a lot of ups and downs, but we stayed together, we kept fighting. That's something that was instilled with us early, just stay together and keep fighting. That's what we did, but we came up short."

Q: Coach Jans talks about being a good aspect of playing in the NCAA First Four was getting this stage to play on where everybody is watching you tonight. What do you have to say to people looking at Mississippi State recruits just about the culture and kind of how cool was it to have this stage all to yourself tonight?

DJJ: "It just shows that Coach knows what he's doing. He's been here multiple times. He told me from the beginning that he said just trust him. We trusted him, went out there and fought for him each and every day. We sacrificed a lot during the season. So, we know what he's doing. You've just got to believe in him. If you want to go to the NCAA Tournament, come to the Bulldogs."

Q: Tolu, your thoughts on the culture the eyes out there watching Mississippi State basketball?

TS: "Yeah, I'm a big advocate for Coach Jans. Before the season, we had a meeting. We sat down, we talked and I loved everything I was hearing. I think all our goals aligned. We made it happen, and everything that he said was going to happen happened. He has a blue print, he knows what he's doing. Like D.J. said, just got to trust and believe in him, and the culture is changing. It's changing at Mississippi State in a good way."

Q: Shakeel, for guys like you coming back next season, how much do you think this experience can help and build what you guys want to do next season?

SM: "Just shows us what to expect for next year. Keep believing, keep fighting and keep trusting in Coach. He'll get us where we want to be, just got to stay together."

Pittsburgh Head Coach Jeff Capel

Q: Opening Statement

JC: "Well, first and foremost, what a great college basketball game in an amazing atmosphere. I want to give a big-time thank you to the fans here in Dayton. You can see that they love basketball, really want to give a huge shout-out to our fans that made the trek here to Dayton. We felt them. They gave us energy when we were a little bit tired. I thought they willed that shot, those last two shots from Mississippi State not to go in. Really proud of my team. We showed toughness, resiliency. We were who we've been all year. It wasn't pretty, but it was beautiful. We just feel so grateful, so thankful, and so excited to be able to advance and get to Greensboro."

Q: Jeff, I know you said you're proud of your guys, but you've challenged them on defense and detail. What's your overall feeling as a coach who's mentored these guys all season long with the defensive effort they gave this game?

JC: "Just really proud of them. They fought. They were tonight who they've been all season long. Tough, resilient, unbelievably together. I mean, for Guillermo as a freshman to start in the NCAA Tournament and play 37 minutes against an all-conference player that's a graduate, that's a grown man, and to stand up to him and to fight throughout and then to make that block at the end. For Jamarius to be sitting for as long as he sat and then to want the ball in that moment and to be able to deliver. For our team to be able to defend this team and hold them under 40 percent shooting. I thought one of the main stats is that we defended really well without fouling. They only shot seven free throws. I think Smith had been averaging about seven free throws a game himself. So, for us to be able to do that and to be able to grind out a game like this, I'm really proud of everyone."

Q: You said you were thankful for the chance to come here to Dayton, and you definitely had a lot of fan support, it looks like. You guys being a few hours away from home, would you say that played an aspect in that considering a lot of teams the next couple days will be flying across the country to come here?

JC: "Yeah, well, I think certainly having our crowd there -- man, when they start the starting lineups, you heard them, you felt it. And throughout the game, you heard the "let's go Pitt" chants. And then at the end when we blocked that shot in those last 2.7 seconds, I thought their energy helped that ball not go in, the three in the corner and then the tip-in."

Q: I saw the moment you had with Guillermo before he walked off the podium. I know how much you and your staff love him and his brother and how far they've come this season in their development. What does that say about the collectiveness and the togetherness of this team and how they represent it?

JC: "Yeah, well, I love all of them. But specifically, as you asked about those two, one of the coolest things for me for this game, besides winning, was how his teammates were with him throughout the game. There were times when he wanted to put his head down, that he didn't feel good about maybe an assignment or missing a shot. And those guys kept telling him, don't do that. We've got your back, we're with you. It's who they've been all year. I'm just -- again, for a freshman to step up on this stage and to play like he did, five rebounds, two blocks, his ball screen defense at the end, for the last, I'd say, about eight minutes, we tried to trap every ball screen with the 5. And for him to be able to do that and get back in there and to fight and to battle, this is the most minutes he's played all year, and just really, really happy for him."

Q: Jeff, that buzzer sounds, you guys win, how do you describe the emotions?

JC: "Happy, excited, relieved. Exhausted but full of energy. Just really happy to see our guys in that moment. Like, to see them, to see how they reacted to it, to see how excited they were and how proud they were of our fight and being together and figuring it out."

Q: You mentioned that tonight they were who they've been all year. The journey of this team when you look at it from where you guys started in season and maybe some people not thinking you were going to do -- you went through tough times, went through great times. The fact that translates into a night like this, as a coach, how fulfilling is it to look at the journey this team has been on?

JC: "I am so proud to be on this journey with them. I'm really proud of the journey they've taken us on. When I say "us," our coaching staff, because it's been really unbelievable when you think about it from the beginning. When we were down in Miami playing for the ACC championship, the night before, my staff and I were just sitting around, and we just started talking about everything, just everything. The first four years, everything that we had been through, and then we started talking about everything that happened at the beginning of this year. Just unbelievably proud and grateful to be a part of them, to be a part of their journey, to have some sort of impact, to watch how they've come together and how they've stuck together, how they have persevered, to watch the joy they bring every day, to watch how they've been able to move on to the next play after a big win or a tough loss, it's been pretty unbelievable."

Guard Jamarius Burton, Guard Nelly Cummings, and Forward Guillermo Diaz Graham

Q: Jamarius, walk us through what was going through your mind ahead of that game-winning shot.

JB: "First and foremost, I just want to thank God. It was a tough game. These guys were continuing to fight. When I had the ball in my hands the last 30 seconds or so, I just told myself I was built for it, and I just got to a spot and let it go, and I had complete confidence in myself. That was pretty much everything that went down."

Q: Guillermo, what was it like tonight battling in the paint with Tolu Smith? How did that go down for you? How are you feeling right now physically?

GD: "Man, I'm exhausted. That was a hell of a fight. He's a really good player, and he was trying to attack me every time. Of course, he's bigger than me. Just fighting, he's bigger than me but I'm going to fight more than you. It's exhausting, but we won, so it was worth it."

Q: Guillermo, with Federiko's knee injury, when did you find out you would be getting the start? Walk us through that process of getting ready for a matchup like this knowing that you would be without a key guy like Federiko?

GD: "I knew it when we were in shootaround because I was in the starting five. You're always ready. You've always got to be ready to step in and help the team. And hopefully for next game, Feddy can be back so he can experience this thing, too, because he was part of the whole year, and now he couldn't play the first time. But I'm sure he's going to be ready for the next one."

Q: Guillermo, what was your feeling when you got that block in the final seconds there? I saw you roar towards the crowd. What was that moment like?

GD: "Just all the energy coming out of my body. I did a block, I don't even know how, with my left hand. I usually don't use my left hand. And I blocked it, and I knew it was a big play, so I just let the energy go out. It's not that good, but I got it locked in back to the two seconds left, but I just couldn't contain it inside."

Q: J.B., with the foul trouble you had in the second half there, you spent a lot of time on the bench there. How did you recollect yourself knowing that you have a moment to go back in and produce in those final minutes?

JB: "Yeah, for me, I was just talking to God most of the time, being engaged with my teammates, encouraging them the whole time, and just understanding that I'll have a moment and have a chance of getting back out there and making an impact for the team."

Q: You're part of the first Pitt team to win a tournament game since 2014. How does it feel to cement yourself in that way? How does it feel to get this win?

NC: "I think it feels good. We're definitely excited about that win and going to enjoy it today, but our work doesn't stop here. We're a hungry team who's ready for whatever challenge in front of us."

GD: "Yeah, I think the people of Pittsburgh deserve this. They're really great. They come all the way here to support us, and I feel like they deserve this feeling again."

Q: Nelly, I think it was a one-possession game for like 26 minutes in a row. What's it like to be in that for such a long stretch where no one can really pull away?

NC: "It's a dogfight. Coming into this game, we were prepared for that. But when you're in the dogfight it's a lot of adrenaline, a lot of emotion, a lot of attention to detail. And I think today we did a really good job of that and staying on task and understanding our assignment."

Q: It seemed like there was a consistent plan whenever they tried to feed to someone against Guillermo down low. You were coming to help and you had a plan of attack. You only had a couple days to talk about this plan and not knowing Feddy wouldn't play until late. What went into the preparation to execute that plan and keep executing it for 40 minutes?

JB: "I would just say it was scouting report. Coach did a great job putting us in positions knowing where they were going to be feeding the ball off of their plays and execution. And for us, we just wanted to be there for our brother. We understood the type of battle he was going to be in, all-conference type of guy, that he was going to be going against, so we just wanted to have his back out there."

NC: "And the attention to detail we had to have to maintain that throughout the game was something that we talked about as soon as we found out who we were playing. As soon as we seen the matchup, we knew we would have to be locked in defensively. Being that Federiko wasn't playing, we just understood the assignment and really just followed it."

GD: "Yeah, we knew they were going to come at me, and I just had my team behind me to help me because I was at a disadvantage, but they helped."