

2022-23 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes
Mississippi State vs. Arkansas – Pine Bluff – November 13, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: Obviously, MJ [Martavious Russell] had the big dunk at the end. What did you think about that and his four-minute stretch MJ in the first half?

CJ: "I love MJ [Russell]. He's going to be a really, really good player. It's not a matter of if, it's just a matter of when. He's going to go from 0-to-60 a little bit in terms of what's required at this level, and the athletes that he's playing against each and every day. It's a transition everyone has to make [going from high school to college basketball]."

"The guys that don't play, they all want to play more. That's just the nature of the beast. That's college basketball in 2022, and I understand that. That's why today was so valuable. That's what I keep telling them. 'Hey, you get out there to get an opportunity. Make the most of it. Be prepared when that opportunity comes and make the most of it.' He, along with Kimani Hamilton, I thought looked really, really good in most of their runs all day long."

Q: After the first couple of games, do you feel players like Will McNair Jr. and Tyler Stevenson are starting to play more like themselves after having nerves maybe in the first couple of games?

CJ: "I think for Tyler specifically, it was just to get him to slow down. He's so excited to be here. He's such a great kid, and I'm so happy he's with us. He's going to help us win games. He's about the right stuff. He's coming home and playing for the Bulldogs. He's got a lot of people, a lot of family, that are around this area that are rooting him on. He looked different tonight, a little more comfortable. The game slowed down for him a little bit. Even though he's experienced, he's not experienced with playing with these new guys and playing for me. Hopefully, like you said, he can continue to get more comfortable. He started to look like he does at practice."

"I have coached Will [McNair Jr.] a long time. So obviously, I think highly of him or I wouldn't have brought him over with us. He struggled early and kind of lost his confidence. The last 24 hours since we've gotten back from Philadelphia, he's been great. He's been smiling, he's being a good teammate and it reflected in his play today. I thought he rebounded the ball really well. He snatched some rebounds out of the air, and he scored around the basket. He knows our system inside and out. He was helping others keep organized. Hopefully, this will help both of those guys move forward."

Q: What did you learn from Tolu Smith's play today that he can contribute to the game in other ways than scoring?

CJ: "He was awesome on the bench. When I glanced down there, he was one of the first ones up. That's an awesome sign when you stand where I do during the game. When the guy who leads us in scoring and rebounding early in the season is getting excited for his teammates and waving the towel – just the emotion he had on his face. That doesn't surprise me. He has been that way in practice. He is an emerging leader. He has been willing and able to open his mouth in some tough situations and try to get some other guys on the right page. It was fun to see. Certainly, I think for all of us, it was nice to know that we can play well and him not to have a huge game for us."

Q: You really balanced offense today – it wasn't really one or two guys dominating the score and a lot of guys had 7 or 8 points. How big is that to kind of get other guys involved rather than just having a couple ball dominate guys?

CJ: "It was great. I've coached a bunch of different teams, and I've had a lot of teams that the stat sheets looked like that. I love it because it's really hard to scout against when you've got that many that contribute to a bunch of different columns. It's hard to prepare for. Who knows how the season will unfold, I can't imagine that it will look like that often. But when it does, it helps team comradery because they are in the game. Everybody's excited because they feel a part of it. We become closer as a team. Again, who knows what the future holds, but I certainly love when that happens."

"I do want to say [Arkansas] Pine Bluff had our full attention as a staff. Every game is going to have a full attention as a staff, but the fact that they lost by one to TCU opening night and lost by eight to Oklahoma on Friday. We obviously talked a ton about that. We showed our guys a bunch of clips. I think that really helped us get our mind right and prepared to play a Sunday afternoon game against a team that maybe doesn't have the name recognition as some of the other teams that these guys have played against in the past. That was helpful to us probably not that helpful to them. I think we caught them at a really good time. They played four games in seven days, and they have been traveling all around the United States playing basketball games. So, that was helpful too."

Forward Kimani Hamilton and Guard Martavious Russell

Q: What's it like to get those kinds of extended minutes early in your college career and for Coach Jans to trust both of you guys early in the season?

KH: "It means a lot to me. We have been up here since the summer just grinding each and every day. I'm just happy that Coach Jans can trust us and put us out there."

MR: "Honestly, it's exciting. Knowing that we practice hard every day with our teammates who all give 100 percent. Our teammates are trusting us, as well as the coaching staff, it just feels great."

Q: MJ, what did you see on that dunk and what was going through your head after you completed that? Kimani what's it like watching that happen?

MR: "During the moment when I was coming down the lane, I was like 'I hope somebody is under here so I can dunk it.' After I dunked, I hoped it went in. Then, when I got up, everybody was around me. I was like 'yeah it went in.'"

Q: So, did you not initially?

MR: Nah, I honestly didn't even know."

KH: "Well for me, when I saw him, I knew he was going to dunk it because I know MJ. So, when it happened, he turned me up. I just started hopping everywhere. I got happy, really really happy for my teammate. That's what I do."

Q: We saw you guys press a lot during that game. What's that like, being up a lot of points and putting that pressure on defensively? How important is it for you guys to play physical on defensive to crack that rotation?

KH: "Coach Jans preaches defense. So, we bring that energy every game with pressing people and trying to turn people over. That's how we're going to play every night."

Q: MJ, you had pretty good stretch in the first half. You had a couple steals, a layup, an assist, a block and took a charge. What kind of contributions are you looking to add when there is a four-minute stretch to go on the court and prove your play?

MR: "Pretty much anything that is needed. I obviously want to bring energy when I come in because you can never go wrong with bringing energy, but really getting rebounds, hustling and doing all the dirty work. As a freshman, that is something that I should be willing to do."

Q: Tolu Smith and D.J. Jeffries had 10 points apiece, but everything else was pretty much spread out evenly. Can you just talk about the balance this team showed today?

KH: "We share the ball. We're going to share the ball well. We're going to play well with each other, and we know everybody get touches. Everybody gets in a groove, and that just gets the whole team going."

Q: Tolu Smith didn't have his typical scoring night [10 points, 7 shot attempts], what have you guys been able to learn from him about other ways that he as a veteran can contribute to games when maybe the shots aren't falling?

KH: "Tolu always makes sure he talks to us. He helps us out so much on the court. Being a leader and being a vet, he's helping and telling us what we are doing wrong. He's helping us get better as a player."

MR: "The same thing he said, he talks to us throughout the whole game. He might not have his typical night, but he's still going to communicate with us and be a leader as he should."