

## **2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes**

### **Mississippi State vs. Rutgers – December 23, 2023**

**Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans**

***Q: Big performance today in front of a Rutgers heavy crowd. Jimmy [Bell Jr.] and Cameron [Matthews] both finished with double doubles. What did Jimmy provide for you guys down low that allowed him to be as effective as he was?***

**CJ:** “Yeah, we’ve got a lot of respect for Coach Pikiell and their program and their players. Obviously, it jumps out at you on the film. We talked about [Clifford] Omoruyi a lot. I think Jimmy took it personally a little bit and wanted to play his best. His motor was going today, and he was our anchor to a lot of the things we’re trying to do offensively. Both with trying to attack Omoruyi at times. but at the same time, do enough to pull him away from the basket to reduce his effectiveness at being a shot blocker. Then, on the other end, just trying to keep it in front of us and staying away from the rolls and lob dunks. Jimmy executed the game plan very well.”

“The biggest key we talked about all day long was rebounding. It felt like that we needed that to be our calling card today. It needed to give us extra possessions. We needed to limit theirs, and I thought for the most part we did a pretty good job.”

***Q: You basically had all five starters return this year. With how the transfer portal is today, what does that say about the team and you as a coach with the fact that you were able to return everyone?***

**CJ:** “Yeah, I don’t like to talk about that in terms of what it says about me, but I think it says a lot about these kids. Their belief in Mississippi State, our program, and how they’re treated. We coach them hard. We tell everybody how it’s going to be, and they didn’t have to take it word-for-word. They were a part of it, no question that it makes you feel really good we’re doing the right thing to get those guys to come back. I think it says more about who they are as kids, as people and what this university means to them. We were pretty giddy once they made those decisions. Hopefully, we can carry some momentum going into Christmas.”

***Q: With Tolu [Smith] being out right now, to have the kind of production down low from players like Cameron Matthews and Jimmy Bell, how big has that been for the overall success of this team?***

**CJ:** “I can’t imagine where we’d be without it. Jimmy came in knowing that Tolu was coming back. He had a lot of confidence in himself. Certainly, no one could have predicted that he would be in this position with playing a bigger role and more minutes than he’s used to. He’s really gotten himself in really good shape. Certainly, we’re all excited about the idea of Tolu rejoining this team, but I don’t know where we’d be without him [Jimmy]. KeShawn Murphy is getting healthier as well. He played a really big game against North Texas a week ago. He couldn’t get it going today, but he gives us a different look playing 5 small ball or 4 big ball with him. Hopefully, he can get his confidence back and play better going forward.”

***Q: How important was Clifford Omoruyi in your scouting report, and how important is he to what they do successfully that you tried to address?***

**CJ:** “He just effects the game so much. He can do a little bit of everything, obviously. His rim protection, not just him, but their team. They’ve got great athletes. They’ve got a lot of pride. They wear it on their sleeves the way they play. [Mawot] Mag and [Aundre] Hyatt seem to play the game the right way. Certainly, we didn’t just talk about Omoruyi, but he had a lot to do with how we game planned and how we tried to prepare to play this game.”

"Certainly, him getting two early fouls, is tough for them. It got them out of rhythm a little bit, but they survived it. They had a great end to the first half, and we didn't. They closed the gap and got him back on the court in the second half."

***Q: This was a neutral site game in front of a 95 percent Rutgers crowd. When you agreed to play in this game, was that something you figured would happen?***

**CJ:** "Yeah, we knew it would be a huge slant towards Rutgers, but we weren't playing in their home arena. I was told by many colleagues not to do that. So, I heeded their advice and agreed to play in the neutral site game."

"That's what we talked about with our team. We played in a similar situation last week against North Texas in Tupelo. It was a 'neutral site game.' but there wasn't much green in the stands. We talked a lot about how we were going to be in their backyard. It's just going to be us having a spattering of Maroon in the crowd, but it would be a lot of red."

"I thought our kids did a good job of keeping them at bay for the most part. That was another thing about the game plan. Omoruyi with those roll lob dunks that he gets, and those putback dunks that he gets energizing the crowd. We were trying to in subtle ways stay away from those plays as well."

***Q: In the second half, you guys found your stride and seemed to dominate on both sides of the ball. What did you say to the team at the half?***

**CJ:** "Our dabbers were down a little bit going into halftime, including mine. I made some silly calls down the stretch that didn't help our team going into halftime. I felt like we had played pretty well, and we were in a good position up 29-24. We played the two-for-one game. Unfortunately, both of our two's were turnovers, and they scored five points as a result of them. It wasn't the way we wanted to end the half. So, I was upset with myself. Our enthusiasm wasn't what I thought it should be, but we tried to reset it. We just really tried to reset it and play with a lot of confidence."

"I thought a big factor in the second half was our ability to take care of the ball. They're very good at turning people over. For the most part, I thought we handled their presses pretty well. We had a lot of respect for them. We spent a lot of time on the different looks that we thought they would give us. It's hard to prepare for it. Luckily, we had a lot of time. They showed so many looks with the matchups and the different variations of their press. They're really good at it, but I was proud of our guys for handling it for the most part."

**Forward Jimmy Bell Jr.**

***Q: What was your gameplan going into this game?***

**JBj:** "Credit to Rutgers, they're a good team. Gameplan was just to keep my confidence going into the game. The past few games, I haven't scored that much. So, Coach [Jans] put that confidence in me. I've just been in the gym working, today was my day. My teammates found me, and I was just able to score the ball."

***Q: What was the gameplan going in to contain Cliff Omoruyi?***

**JBj:** "Coach [Jans] did a good job hyping me up. We watched a lot of film on those guys. Credit to [Cliff Omoruyi], he's a good player. One game doesn't define who he is, he's a good player. I've seen him throughout the years. I just came into the game thinking I was going to try and outwork him, and I think I did my job."

***Q: This is the second time you have played in the Gotham Classic with the first time being at Saint Louis. How cool has it been to see your game evolve from then to now?***

**JBJ:** "It feels good. It's just the work paying off. I feel that I'm one of the hardest workers in the country. You can ask anyone. If you put in the work, the results are going to show."

***Q: What does it take to rebound a team like that by a 47-26 margin?***

**JBJ:** "It's just the will to go to the glass. We knew coming into the game they weren't a great defensive rebounding team. So, Coach [Jans] just stressed that on us with offensive rebounding. All year, we've been a good offensive rebounding team. Today, we listened to him, and it worked out for us."

***Q: What was it like playing in this environment with it being neutral site, even though it was pretty much a Rutgers home game?***

**JBJ:** "It felt good. I think this was really our second game like this. Our first one was [on the road] against Georgia Tech. We lost the game, and we knew we couldn't come in like that, especially coming into the Christmas break. We just had to stay focused on this game. That's what we did, and we got the win."

**Rutgers Head Coach Steve Pikiell**

***Opening Statement***

**SP:** "I appreciate everyone coming here during the holiday time. I want to thank our crowd for showing up. Obviously, I've got a ton of respect for Mississippi State. I watched too much film, and I think they're one of the best defensive teams in the country. I thought for 20 minutes we hung around, but it's on me to figure out this rebounding thing. We didn't do a great job on the backboard, and obviously that led to free throws. We played an NCAA Tournament team, and I told our guys if we can find a way for 40 minutes then we would have a chance. This was a big, physical basketball game, and we didn't take care of the backboards the way we needed to."

***Q: How can you team get help when Clifford Omoruyi isn't able to score or ends up getting in foul trouble?***

**SP:** "He was in foul trouble today, and that was really tough. He never really got into the flow at all. We played on some runs without him. When I left him in [to start the second half], he got two quick fouls right away. We couldn't get a break today. Obviously, we need Cliff. He's very good, but it's a team game. It's on me to make sure he doesn't get into foul trouble. We've got to play better as a group, and I've got to do better."

***Q: Talk about the adjustments you feel that Mississippi State made during the second half to break away and win the game.***

**SP:** "They do a really good job at Mississippi State. They have unbelievable players, and they're very old. Obviously, [Jimmy] Bell [Jr.] is a problem in the post, and [Cameron] Matthews is a grown man. Their age, their experience and their ability to play hard does them well. They are a top-five defensive team in the country. So, we had to play well for 40 minutes on a neutral site, and we didn't. They went on a good run and had good opportunities. We had some shot attempts that I told our guys that we had to take. They were open, and they gave you those tough shots at the mid-range. We didn't execute today, but we played really hard. We will keep fighting, especially against a team like that".

***Q: Can you speak on Derek Simpson's shooting struggles?***

**SP:** "He had some really good shots today too. He didn't make all of his shots tonight, but we had to continue to take the shots we had. They're a team that doesn't give you a lot of open looks, and they're a very hard team [to play against]. You've got to score on transition, and you've got to take what they give you. We took care of the ball. We didn't force a lot of turnovers, but we've got to connect on the good looks we had."

***Q: Can you talk about the leadership that Aundre Hyatt provides for your team?***

**SP:** "Aundre has been very consistent, and he's been a good rebounder these last three games too. He has helped us a lot, but his work ethic has been amazing. He scored effectively, and he's playing with confidence. We really need that from our veteran guys. He is a little banged up. So, he deserves a couple days off, but I know he'll be a big part of solving our rebounding problem."

**Guard Aundre Hyatt**

***Q: What was Coach Pikiell's message to the team after the loss***

**AH:** "We need to get back to the basics. We need to be more physical when boxing out, and I feel like we have it in us. This was a really good test against a really good team, and we need to get ready for Big Ten play."

***Q: Can you talk about the momentum swing in your team's favor at the end of the half and the three you hit before the buzzer?***

**AH:** "Time was going down. They called an isolation play. He dribbled right into my hand, and I got the steal. I was able to make a really good play at the end [of the half]."