

2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes

No. 21 Mississippi State vs. Southern – December 3, 2023

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: How was practice this week? Did you sense something like this coming?

CJ: "I thought our practices were of the right tenure, if you will, after losing at Georgia Tech. We were certainly very disappointed that night, and we've been very disappointed since that loss kind of rallying the troops. We've had plenty of time to stew on it and dissect it, learn to grow from it. I didn't expect this, certainly. I don't think anyone in that room would've expected this. We thought Tuesday was tough, and it's going to pale in comparison to this."

Q: What did you see from the stretch where the offense was stagnant?

CJ: "If I had the answer, I would've fixed it during the game. Was it 59-50, or was it more than that? I thought it was 59-50 at some point. Then, they scored the last 10 [points]. It was 15-2 overall, but it also was 10-0 at the end. We knew they would press us, and we expected that. We handled it for the most part in the first half. They were falling back to more of their tandem 2-3 [zone] in the first half with maybe one or two possessions of their 1-3-1 [zone]. We did a decent job, not great."

"In the second half, they mixed it up especially over the last four or five minutes. They got out of the rhythm of zone press back to the tandem of 2-3. They went more 1-3 and 1-3-1. We weren't as aggressive looking back as we probably should've been against the press and trying to score and maybe get them out of it. We were almost satisfied to break it, and it's a tough style to play against. Kudos to Coach Johnson, their staff and their players. They played really hard, and we expected them to play hard. They never gave up, and they stuck around. They found a way to win on the road."

"I thought, in the end there, we were on our heels. The changing of the defenses after the press slowed us down. Regardless of that, when you only have 16-18 seconds after breaking it, then trying to get organized against the zone can be difficult if you're not seasoned and not on top of what you're supposed to be doing. When it became like five, six, seven seconds left on the clock and we didn't have a lot of offensive momentum, we had a hard time breaking them down. We had a hard time getting two guys to guard one and getting a paint touch and trying to make a play for someone else. Then, when we did, we had multiple opportunities the last few possessions at the rim. We just couldn't stick it in the goal for some reason. We just had multiple guys with multiple opportunities on a lot of those possessions to get a big drive finish or a stick back finish. We weren't able to do that."

Q: You have a full week off before you play again on Saturday. Would you see that as a positive advantage after a game like this? How do you view it, and what's going to be the message when you guys get back together tomorrow?

CJ: "You know since we've arrived, I think being 1-7 in the SEC was probably the biggest adversity that we have faced thus far. In my opinion, it's going to pale in comparison to what we're going to go through moving forward. This is going to stay with us all year long, and there's no way around it. We're going to have to figure out how we move forward as a group, and it's going to be hard. It's going to be tough, and it's going to challenge the fabric of our program. It's going to challenge some individuals in our program in terms of staying tight, staying together and believing in what we're doing individually and collectively."

"It's going to be a test. It's going to be a real challenge. You mentioned this week, having to wait all week before we play another game, and that's going to be hard too. It's going to be hard. But even then, this isn't going to go away for a long, long time, or ever this season depending on how it unfolds."

Q: We saw Tolu today not wearing his boot, do you have any updates on him? Is he progressing quicker, or as you expected at this point?

CJ: "Yeah, he had some recent scans that the doctors were pleased with. The timetable hasn't necessarily been updated, but he's been able to at least get out of that boot and start moving around on the basketball court. He's not practicing or anything of that nature, but he's been able to start moving a little bit and getting a feel."

Q: When you say this next stretch of games is going to be a challenge and going to stick with you guys, what gives you confidence that this group is going to be able to handle that and put this past week behind them?

CJ: "Yeah, I meant more it's just a big picture for our program: the test, the challenge, handling adversity and losing a home game in this fashion. I think most people think we're going to be angry, we're going to be playing our best and not happy, and we weren't."

"Trust me, at the end of the day, I get how this works. I'm responsible for our program and responsible for getting our guys ready to play. I've got to do better, and I'm not happy about some of the things, decisions that I've made. I've got to go through that and learn and grow myself. It's just going to be tough because there's going to be a lot of people in your ears individually. They're going to question why this, why that? If they take the bait individually, it could cause some strife amongst us. That's what our biggest obstacle is going to be is to stick together and continue to believe and the buy in's stay the same. Somehow, someway, we pick ourselves off the ground and go forward."

Forward Cameron Matthews

Q: What was it offensively that you guys struggled with at the end?

CM: "From my perspective, honestly, I just feel like we were stagnant and tough on our heels. It was like we didn't know what we were doing. That's pretty much the main piece on that."

Q: After the loss at Georgia Tech, what was practice like this week? Did you sense this coming?

CM: "We just started by trying to get back to ourselves, trying to find our identities and trying to get back into the game. They just made a few more plays than us today."

Q: With the amount of veterans on this team, how concerning is it that at the end of the game that there's so much confusion?

CM: "It's concerning just off the fact that we've got guys out here that have been in situations like that. We should take the elements and direct things that we're doing. I take the blame for that one, it's on me."

Q: You were here last season when the team went through the losing streak going into SEC play, what did you learn from that experience to get over these couple of losses and get back into the win column?

CM: "Being grateful for every opportunity and not taking any game for granted. Trying our best to not let the losses snowball – just try and go out there every day and compete."

Q: Their offense was especially rolling and was running through Tai'Reon Joseph who ended with 27 points. What made him so tough to stop for you guys on defense today?

CM: "In the beginning, he was kind of putting his head down, getting to the cup and making tough finishes. So, shout out to him."

Q: You guys had Andrew Taylor back today. What did you think about the way he played and got back into the mix?"

CM: "I'm proud of Andy. He's been going through some things. So, I'm just glad he's back out there being himself and just trying to be more confident. So, I'm glad to see him back out there."

Southern Head Coach Kevin Johnson

Q: Coach, you guys had that 12-0 run to close out. What do you think your team was doing defensively to slow down Mississippi State and give yourself a chance?

KJ: "I think it was the zone. We don't have the size to matchup with those guys man-to-man. Them having a guy like Jimmy Bell, it's almost like six on five sometimes. I felt like it was a way to, at least somewhat, try to neutralize the game."

Q: Tai'Reon Joseph, what an incredible game by him. Never mind the points, he has the game winning block there at the end. Just tell us about his performance, and what made him so successful today?

KJ: "Tai'Reon Joseph is a very good player. Not only that, he's a competitor. You know a guy where we're his fourth stop. But I'm a Louisiana guy, I watched him all through high school. He's always been talented, and I'm just hoping him being at home gives him a chance to have a really good finish for his career. But there's no question about his talent."

Q: How proud are you of your team even getting down by 12 and still compete like they did?

KJ: "I'm so proud of them. We preach to them all the time to stick with it. We go down to Arizona – stick with it. We go down at Illinois – stick with it. Lose in overtime to Western Illinois, don't hang your head, be ready for the next opportunity. Lose a tough game to Valparaiso. I mean think about these guys, eight road games in a row, those guys never once quit. So, that's how proud I'm of our players."

Q: What did it mean to have that moment in the locker room with them?

KJ: Yeah, that's one of the joys. You know 30 years in the game for me. That's a feeling in the locker room with those players, it never gets old."