

2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes Mississippi State vs. Arkansas – February 17, 2024

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: Considering the foul trouble for Josh Hubbard, how good was it to have him at the end of the game?

CJ: “Yeah, I wasn’t real excited about him having two early foul calls. I just never dreamt that was going to be the case, but we played him a few minutes, a couple runs. I felt like we trusted him and needed him out there for a bunch of different reasons. So, we survived that. It felt pretty good going into halftime surviving that situation. Then, certainly he made some huge shots, game-changing shots down the stretch for us.”

Q: You’re no stranger to big games, and you guys have gotten three straight wins after the Alabama loss. What are you seeing from this team, whether it be mentally or on the court, to get this winning streak going?

CJ: “I really like where they’re at. I even said that if you remember when we got beat that night [at Alabama], and beat soundly, that I still believed in this group. I was shocked that we didn’t play better in that particular game. But, they stuck together, they didn’t lose confidence. They kept practicing at a high level. Their energy, and their vibe has been good.”

“Certainly, winning helps that. Everyone feels better when you win. This last week with having a week off, they were generally excited at practice. We had some lively sessions, especially Thursday and Friday. So, I think they’re where they need to be right now.”

Q: Looking at some of your other wins in the SEC, this one was kind of a ‘grind it out’, but you saw your team gut out a win when they weren’t playing their best. How does that make you feel seeing them be able to do that?

CJ: “I feel great about how they won. It’s what I told them in the locker room; ‘Don’t let anyone out there take away what you did today.’ Winning college basketball games is hard. There’s going to be people on social media, people in your circle who love you that are going to be asking you why we didn’t play better. You need to set them straight. We won against a very talented team. It may not have been as aesthetically pleasing as everybody wants it to be. But, at this point in the season, you just got to win. I’m proud of the fact that they stuck together. Our huddles were good. They found a way, and that’s what it’s about.”

“It’s not going to be exactly the way you want it. Certainly, I wanted to come out and play perfect. Get a stop every time [on offense] and get a great look every time [on defense]. Obviously, it doesn’t work that way. Even though we didn’t play our best, Arkansas had something to do with that. They’ve got really good players. They don’t have their glossy record that they want or expect, but their staff has obviously done a tremendous job. They’re a proud program. They came in here and battled us for 40 minutes. They were trying to win the game just like we were. So, like I said, I’m proud that they stuck together, and they found a way to win the game.”

Q: It was another one of those games where Cameron Matthews seemingly just does every little thing. He set the screen on Josh [Hubbard]’s three pointer and poked the ball out on Shak [Moore]’s steal at the end there. What more can you say about the way he competes?

CJ: “He needs to not turn the ball over in the first half, that’s one thing he needs to do. But I don’t get tired of talking about him. He’s our heartbeat, and he’s our leader. He’s our voice along with some other guys, but he’s the biggest voice in the room. He made some plays where you’re just like, wow, he’s showing everybody who’s the most competitive dude on the court.”

“He had some plays like that tonight, and I’m certainly glad he was wearing our colors. I don’t know if we win if he’s not out there. He just makes so many plays that don’t show up in the stat sheet too. He’s always in the right spot defensively. He’s suggesting what we should do. He’s really grown that way, and I love that he’s so bought in. His knowledge of the game is so high. That’s what he doesn’t get credit for. His IQ of the game, how to play in our system and what we need to be doing, he’s suggesting stuff all of the time. I’m listening to him. He’s out there and knows what’s going on better than I do. Just glad he’s with us.”

Q: Talk about the performance of your defense there in the last few possessions that ultimately got you this victory.

CJ: “We were disappointed the last five or six minutes prior to the three or four possessions at the end of the game. We just felt like we were too extended on the ball. They were getting into our bodies and getting angles on us even without a ball screen. That was frustrating. Then, our bigs for whatever reason, weren’t where they needed to be when the ball screen happened. So, they were getting into them a little bit. Then, we weren’t switching it. We were committing to the ball too much, so Makhi Mitchell kept getting behind us. They kept hitting the roller and giving us some fits that way. I thought at least the last couple possessions, they did a better job of it. We were able to get a couple stops to win the game.”

Q: Tolu [Smith III] was battling foul trouble, and it looked like he went back to the tunnel a couple of times. Was he nursing something throughout the game?

CJ: “Yeah, I guess he had some cramping, I’m not exactly sure. I haven’t talked to the trainer yet, but that’s kind of what I was told. He obviously could finish the game and continue to play. I’ll get into it more here when I’m through. But, first part of the game, I thought we were getting him the ball where he needed it and where he likes it. He missed a couple that normally you would hope he would make, and I think it shook him just a little bit. Then again, they got really good size and rim protection. They give a lot of people problems around the basket.”

“Then, obviously, he had the foul trouble. We couldn’t get him out fast enough. So, he ended up getting his fourth. It was a bad situation. We need to do better next time. He had to sit over there for a long, long time, but we still went with him for the most part the last few possessions of the game.”

Q: What do you make of Shakeel Moore at the end there not only coming up with the steal but sinking those two free throws after he was fouled to seal the game?

CJ: “The radio folks told me it was his second game in a row where he hasn’t missed a shot ... He was 3-for-3 tonight. I haven’t talked to him about needing to be shooting more or shooting less. I let them make that decision when the game’s going on. Late, it was a big play. It was just big free throws. We needed someone to step up, make both and put us in a situation where we can foul up three with 7.7 [seconds left]. Actually, we were trying to foul a little bit earlier. It was a little too close for comfort, but it worked out.”

Mississippi State Guards Josh Hubbard and Shakeel Moore

Q: What was the message going into the last couple of minutes to help you come back?

SM: “Yeah, we knew those guys didn’t have the glossiest record, but every team is good in our league. We just had to hone in on not making them comfortable, not letting them feel good in the game and locking down on defense.”

Q: Shak, take us through that last steal you had on defense. Before that, Josh, take us through that three-pointer you made.

SM: "I knew he was going to drive one way, get crowded and spin the opposite way. So, I just took the chance and took the risk to steal the ball."

JH: "We knew we were down with close to a minute left, and we just knew that we had to get a quick bucket. We just read what the defense gave us and took the shot."

Q: What did you guys see from the Arkansas defense? Early on, pretty much all the points were either in the paint or at the foul line. Was that what the game plan was going in?

SM: "To be honest, yeah. We knew that they feed off quick shots and force shots ... Either shooting three's, getting to the basket or getting to the free throw line. But their defense didn't really go away. So, we had to find ways to dig deep."

Q: Shak, you've been here a while and have had success against Arkansas. What's it about playing the Hogs that makes you guys come out of your shell?

SM: "Maybe, they just catch us around the time that we must win. I just feel like whenever we play them, we're in that time of the season when we've just got to get a dub."

Q: When some of those three's weren't falling in the second half, what gave you the confidence to rise up and take that shot with such little time left?

JH: "Just move on to the next shot, you know? I've always played with a lot of confidence, and they instill confidence in me each and every day at practice. I do the same towards them. Just forget about it, know that you can knock it down and don't let that one shot bring you down. Just stay positive."

Q: It's tough to come out of the game early, but how pleasing was it to be there in the end when the difference had to be made?

JH: "It was a blessing and an honor to go there and play with four of the guys because I go against them every day. It was fun, it was a great experience."

Q: What has it been like watching Josh blossom in these moments in front of big crowds for SEC games?

SM: "It's amazing, he's fearless. I always say anytime somebody asks me that question that he reminds me of myself my freshman year. Just fearless, doesn't back down from anything and he's just a getter."

Arkansas Head Coach Eric Musselman

Q: Ideally, the timeout with 23 seconds left, I'm sure you would've loved to put the ball in either Khalif Battle, Tramon Mark or Keyon Menifield Jr's hands, but they all either fouled out or were hurt. How tough was that, and what was the plan coming out of that timeout?

EM: "I think, first of all, super proud of effort. When you're without a preseason all-league player that's 6'11 [Trevon Brazille], any team in the league would go through some struggles. Thought we played really good against Tennessee in the first half, and thought we played really poorly against Tennessee in the second half."

"I thought tonight we played 40 minutes. Look, Mississippi State is an extremely physical team. Coach Jans is a great defensive coach. Anybody that has played against Coach Jans' team, whether it's New Mexico State, how the free throws are 32 to 19 I have no idea. We got a limited roster and had three players foul out. So, super proud of our team."

"I know our fans, I know our locker-room, I know our coaching staff – our players are super frustrated without coming away with the win but, with any ballclub it's about can you improve. Do you give it your all, and are you playing with effort, energy, and enthusiasm? We played as hard as we possibly could today."

Q: Not to have the guys you'd love to have on the floor because they fouled out or they were hurt, how tough was that, and what were you looking to get out of that timeout?

EM: "Yeah, we were trying to run what we ran most of the second half when we scored 38 points and scored nine more points than we did in the first half. We made an adjustment with how we were running our middle pick-and-roll, and we had a guard down pinned for Makhi Mitchell to come up to the top of the circle to set a screen for El Ellis. He'd make a decision whether we wanted to go left or right, but obviously when you have three-point threats like [Khalif] Battle and [Tramon] Mark not out there. We had a ballclub today where we did not have a power forward on the roster, and we had three guys foul out."

"That position got dominated today because we had guards playing it or we had two centers playing it. So, much credit to Cameron Matthews and his performance, but the gameplan was try to do what we could with Tolu Smith [III]. I thought we did that by going at him and getting him in foul trouble. Lost the game though."

Q: When you're down by three with seven seconds, were you looking to get maybe a quick two, or what were you looking to get there?

EM: "No, we were looking to get a three. We felt that with seven seconds, full-court, you're going to take at least three seconds of the clock. I mean, if we were in the NBA where you can advance the ball, we certainly would've gone for a two, but there's no advancing the ball in men's college basketball. There is in women's college basketball, there is in the NBA, there is in the G-League, but there's not here. So, seven seconds down three, we thought the best decision being on the road was to try to get a three."

Q: Just a little bit more on Makhi, what does that say about the performance he had coming off the Tennessee game, to go for 21 points and 9 rebounds and as you mentioned a very physical game?

EM: "We need his physicality. I thought he did a great job in pick-and-rolls, both as a short roller, making plays which we've utilized him in spots, depending on how the opponent plays pick-and-roll coverages. It was a really good game for him to step up. We knew that Tolu Smith is an incredibly offensively talented player. We wanted to make Smith defend a little bit, and I thought that Makhi did that by aggressively going to the basket."

Q: How do you deal with a team that rebounds like that?

EM: "Well, they're a great offensive rebounding team. They're super physical. As stated early, we didn't have a power forward even available tonight. So, we're playing [Jeremiah] Davenport there, and he's played small forward his whole life. So, with that particular matchup at the four spot, Cam Matthews went 6-for-7, and he took 10 free throws attempted, which is almost more than our whole team by the way. He had 10 rebounds, 4 of those being offensively."

"So, we knew Tolu Smith would rebound. Then, I thought KeShawn Murphy, number 12, did a good job scraping out three offensive boards as well. Certainly, the 17 offensive rebounds is problematic, but we also knew that from a size standpoint, without [Jalen] Graham, without [Trevon] Brazile, that's going to be an area of concern. Just as it will be an area of concern when we go to A&M."

Arkansas Guard Khalif Battle

Q: How tough was that to watch from the bench knowing that you and T [Tramon Mark] were both out at the end of the game?

KB: "It was tough, but we played a good team so things like that happen. Regardless of if T-Mark and I are in the game, we still have to be able to finish the game. It's not on them. It's still on us as a team."

Q: This was by far your best game in the SEC, and you've had some good games. How have you dealt with that, and what's the key to having a game like this when the minutes haven't been there lately?

KB: "My work hasn't changed. It's just that we have a lot of talented guys on the team, and you just got to be ready when your name is called. Whether I don't play or whether I play 40 minutes, the number one goal is to win. So, I don't really get into that, but I know what I'm capable of. It doesn't change my work ethic and how I approach every single day."

Q: Makhi really played well. What'd you think of his game and how he helped y'all stay in the game and almost win it?

KB: "He played really well. He battled down there. He had a lot of key buckets for us. He played hard, and it sucks that we couldn't get the win."