

2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes

Mississippi State vs. No. 16 Kentucky– February 27, 2024

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: What did you see from Kentucky offensively in the second half to allow them to come back and get out front to win the ball game?

CJ: “Once we hit a couple of shots to start the second half, I think the lead got to 13 [52-39]. They subbed pretty quickly and got [Rob] Dillingham and [Reed] Shephard back into the game. Those two were as dynamic of guards as there are in the country, and they come off the bench. They just picked their pace up, and they were playing with more pace offensively. They were more determined.”

“We had some breakdowns and gave up angles out front without the ball screens. When the ball screens came, for whatever reason, we weren’t as aggressive early in the second half. They got downhill on us. They got some lobs behind us. We were disappointed with our coverage there. We shorted up a little bit as the game unfolded. You got to give them a lot of credit. We had the game where we wanted it, and they flipped the script on us.”

Q: What did you see in the last minute and the last few seconds from your point of view?

CJ: “It was pretty fast and furious. It was a heck of a play by Josh [Hubbard] to give us a chance to go to overtime at that point. It’s a scramble situation. I’ll have to watch the film, but he [Reed Sheppard] rose up. And unfortunately, I had a really good angle. I was pretty sure that it was going in. It was a heck of a play. He [Sheppard] controlled the game for his team in the last minute of the game. He’s so savvy and so smart. It’s like a coach out there on the floor. He was inbounding the ball and getting it right back. He’s obviously an excellent free throw shooter and put us in some tough positions in having to foul him down the stretch.”

Q: How does the team being able to recover from a slow SEC start give you confidence that they can flush this and get ready for Auburn this weekend?

CJ: “Time will tell, I don’t know. We got a day off tomorrow with the Tuesday game, we’ll see. We have a heck of a schedule to finish. We had that game where we needed it, but it’s a 40-minute game. We just didn’t get it done. It’s like what I’ve been saying all year long to anybody that listens to me. The games are like the season. In the games, time runs out. Opportunities run out. When you have an opportunity to win a game like this on your home floor, you’ve got to get it done. We just didn’t do it at the end of the day.”

Q: How much did you notice your veterans stepping up and not being daunted by the lead Kentucky was able to build late in the game?

CJ: “We’ve got great leadership on our team. Those guys, you know who we’re talking about, they leave everything on the floor. They’re unbelievable in the huddles. They’re encouraging. Down the stretch, there was no give up with them. They continued to scratch, fight, claw and make as many plays as they can. It’s tough for us. Josh’s performance was at a high level with shots he made. Not only at the end, but at the guts of the game. It’s disappointing that it’s all for not.”

Q: Can you touch on the composure that Josh Hubbard had at the end of the game especially to hit those three three-pointers in the final minute?

CJ: “I’ve been saying it all year. You guys asked me Monday [at the media session] if we were concerned about Josh’s performance against Kentucky the last time, and I said ‘I hadn’t even talked to him about it. I don’t think there’s a moment that he fears. He loves to have the ball in his hands, and he’s very confident.’”

Q: How big is it to flush the winning streak coming to an end and gain momentum to close out the regular season going into postseason play?

CJ: “We didn’t talk about the winning streak. I don’t think I ever brought it up, not one time. We just truly look at each game as its own entity. I’ve said this before, but we treat them [every game] as the Super Bowl in how we prepare mentally and physically.”

“That doesn’t concern me. Yeah, you want to win every game, and I understand that. Everybody wants to win every game. Every coach does, every player does and every fan does, but we really get caught up in that. We really just got caught up in trying to win this particular game. I’m sure by Thursday when we reconvene, we’ll talk about this. We’ll watch film. We’ll learn, we’ll grow and we’ll move on. This team has shown the ability to move on. By the time we play our next game, it’s going to be March. These games are very meaningful, and I’m sure when they tip the ball on Saturday that they’ll be ready to go.”

Mississippi State Guard Josh Hubbard and Forward Tolu Smith III

Q: As a team, Kentucky is hard to guard especially when a player like Reed Sheppard when he gets it going like that in the second half. What was Kentucky doing to get him those looks?

JH: “They sped the tempo up even though after we made a good run in the start of the [second] half. They made their run with huge three’s, slowly coming back. We just had to adjust quickly. We did that later in the second half, but they made some tough shots towards the end.”

Q: What was the message in the huddles that allowed you and your teammates to cut the lead down? What made you believe you could make that run in the last minute?

TS III: “I think everyone has a lot of confidence in this team. At the end of the day, it was just about staying together, and that’s what we did. Although we didn’t come out with the outcome we wanted, we cut that lead down just like you said. It just goes to show what we’re capable of.”

Q: What have you seen differently from your team that has the offense to flow better during these past couple of weeks?

JH: “We’re running sets with more of a pace. We trust the offense more with what Coach [Jans] instills in us every day in practice. It’s all just coming together at the end of the day. It’s just reps after reps to keep building that confidence.”

Q: Was there any added confidence tonight after the showing compared you had at Kentucky earlier this season?

JH: “I’m motivated every game. We all motivate each other and build confidence in each other. So, it’s just another day in the office. I just wish we were able to come out with the victory.”

Q: We’ve seen Josh [Hubbard] hit big shots against good teams whether it be at home or on the road. How much trust do you have in him especially with him being a freshman to hit shots like that?

TS III: “It’s a lot of trust, he’s proven. We don’t look at him as a freshman. We look at him as darn near a veteran guy. He plays like that. So, there’s a lot of high expectations for him. He has a lot of high expectations for himself. His resume speaks for itself, and it goes to show how great of a player he is.”

Q: Your team has another tough opponent on the road on Saturday at Auburn. How do you and your teams put your focus on that with the way this one ended?

TS III: "We have three more left, it's onto the next one. Obviously, we need to go back to the drawing board to figure out things we need to work on, and our kinks. It's down to the wire. So, we're worrying about the next game now."

Q: How have you seen the atmosphere of the arena grow in your four years here, especially with some big wins this and even tonight after a tough loss?

TS III: "It's amazing. That's why it hurts a little for me, and it stings so bad with how much everyone is coming out and showing faith. It felt like there was no open seat. Having The Hump rocking like that, that's a great feeling for me. I feel like I'm from Starkville at this point. I pray that they [the fans] keep coming this year, next year and for the years to come."

Q: Josh, anything to add to what Tolu [Smith III] just said?

JH: Just keeping packing The Hump. We're going to keep making you satisfied for sure."

Kentucky Head Coach John Calipari

Opening statement

JC: "We had two or three good foul shooters. Either one of them could make free throws if you throw one deep. He [Reed Sheppard] was trying to do the high school 'I'm going to dribble it and dribble it.' All of a sudden, he's like, 'Oh no.' There will be some that say – 'why didn't you call timeout?' - because of what just happened. They can't set up their defense. They had no timeouts."

"You look at D.J.[Wagner] and say make something happen. The ball ends up in Reed's [Sheppard] hands. He goes and makes it. I always have done that. Not calling timeouts in those situations. It was too early to foul a three-point shooter. You can't foul him with 16 or 17 seconds left to go. You should've fouled anyway," Stop, let me coach the team. You enjoy these games, it's too early. He makes the three, but we have eight seconds. So, now, we come down and end up winning the game. He played unbelievable, [Josh] Hubbard, he made some ridiculous plays."

"It is so nice to have D.J. back playing and making shots. You have to understand before he sat down, he was a 40 percent three-point shooter. He was doing all the stuff – coming back takes time to get your rhythm back, and it's taken him time. I'm not like, 'Don't play him anymore. Stop. Today was a really physical game, hard for Justin [Edwards] to be how he was every other day. I needed him to rebound."

"Our bigs did fine. A little upset at the timeout, and I said, 'Ugo [Ugonna Onyensu], don't foul. A layup will not hurt us. Do not foul,' and we fouled. Did you not hear? 'I thought I could block it.' I said, 'Don't worry about it.' We had some of those today. We walk out of here. That is not a first or second round NCAA game, you're in the third round. That's who you're playing. They're that good. They are in the 20s in the NET rankings. They beat Tennessee here, and they beat Auburn here. This was a big-time win. We're going to celebrate. To beat these guys and how they are playing right now, big time."

Q: You're down 13 and still find a way to pull it out. What does it do for these guys with this young team?

JC: "We'll be alright. We've lost a couple of these. We've lost a couple just like this. Now, you win one. It evens out over the season. We were 0-2, and I'm hoping there down the road a little bit that we get one."

"We just stick with these guys. We've got good players, good guys, and that is a good team. They've got breakdown guys. I'll be honest. They're kind of built for the tournament too. Why? Because they've got a couple guys that can just go get baskets, and they've got size. I'm just happy we're done playing them."

Q: On the last play, it looked like D.J. [Wagner] was trying to drive. Then, it wasn't there. So, he made the smart play to kick it back out. How much confidence does that give you?

JC: "I said after the game to the team, 'Isn't it nice to have D.J. back?' He makes that three in the corner ... He's learning, and that's all part of the process. But I want you to know he's shooting 40 percent from the three-point line before he stepped out because of the injury. 40 percent. Then, he comes back and can't make a shot. No one understands why, but he didn't touch a basketball for two and a half weeks. It's going to take him some time. He's still not all the way back, but he's getting to where we're all really confident with him in the game."

Q: Can you talk about Reed [Sheppard] and his overall performance as a freshman in a big road environment? He just steps up and makes the moment his.

JC: "Well, we had to make some three's to stay in the game. So, we were running stuff to make some three's in the first half. He made a bunch. They went zone, and he took one, a 40-footer. I took a look at him like, 'Are you kidding me? Why did you do that?' And so I said 'I hate to tell you not to, but come on. Then, we put him in the middle of the zone, and he makes the right play. He's steady. Sometimes, with his reactions to stuff he's trying to steal every ball. To make that play and not be phased by it, his focus was on making the basket, was incredible."

Q: With about 4:51 left there was a graphic on the jumbotron that said not to rush the floor afterward. Did you see it? Do you know if any players saw it?

JC: "I wish I had seen it. In 1992 [at UMass], we're playing in the NIT against Sienna. We're down three with 3.6 seconds to go. They get on the mic and say that the buses are going to leave for the Garden [Madison Square Garden] on this day at this time. They make the three, and they beat them in overtime. One of my guys was like, 'What time are those buses leaving?' So, I've been in those situations, but I didn't see it."

Q: Is Tre [Mitchell] any closer?

JC: "I think so. We'll have a good practice in a couple days and see where he is."

Kentucky Guards D.J. Wagner and Reed Sheppard

Q: "What's going on through your mind as you come down the court for the last time?"

RS: "We had some big shots down the stretch with all those three's. They're really tough shots. We threw it down really quick in those few seconds. D.J. [Wagner] was coming down, and we trust in each other. I trust in what he was going to do. He can penetrate and push it back to me, and I was able to make a play. But a lot of those plays comes from my teammates and giving me the confidence and telling me in the huddles, 'Just keep playing, just keep attacking.'"

Q: "What does that play that D.J. Wagner didn't make say about the trust that he has in everyone else?"

RS: "Everyone on the court wanted to shoot that shot. Everyone knew that he was going to shoot that shot. D.J. knew, and he tried to attack there in the air. He just made the right basketball play. That's what's so special about this team."

Q: After what happened last week in Baton Rouge, how does it feel to have this break your way instead of going the other way?

DJW: "I just have to say it felt great. Right after the game, I was thinking, 'Finally'."

Q: Reed, can you talk about what it meant to have that shot out there, playing out there for your state and a place where your parents played?

RS: "It was really cool. Growing up as a little kid, I always wanted to play at Kentucky. So, going out there and getting the game winning shot for Kentucky was really special for me. This group of guys is really close on and off the court."

Q: What changed from the first half to the second half defensively for you guys?

DJW: "I think we took pride in not giving up second chances. We weren't getting defensive rebounds in the first half. So, we had to make sure that we were doing that and pushing forward."