

2023-24 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Postgame Quotes Mississippi State vs. Georgia – February 7, 2024

Mississippi State Head Coach Chris Jans

Q: With no D.J. Jeffries today, what did you think of the way Shawn [Jones Jr.], KeShawn [Murphy] and some others stepped up to fill that role especially on the defensive end?

CJ: “You could look at Shawn Jones’ box score and say that he didn’t shoot it well. He didn’t play great, etcetera, but I thought he played with great mental. I thought he had a great approach. I thought he was flying around defending and running around the court. Then, for him to take that shot I talked about it in the locker room with the guys, he’s just got confidence running through his veins because that was a big shot at a big moment. He hadn’t made one, and he’d shot a few. I was proud of him. That was a big shot for him, personally. It kind of shows you where he’s at.”

“I thought KeShawn, obviously, gave us a big boost on the offensive end. He made four of our 25 baskets. Obviously, he’s very talented. We’ve been talking about him since we’ve arrived. On the other end, he struggled a little bit. On that end of the floor, he blew some coverages. Certainly, he’s got to get going on that end. We basically in the second half basically started saying that we couldn’t play him that long with his game legs, his cardio, his rhythm. But given the D.J. situation, it was nice to have another guy to throw out there that had some size.”

Q: What were your thoughts on the defensive effort in the first half? Also, to see Rams [Dashawn Davis] get eight assists and direct the offense like he’s accustomed to doing?

CJ: “Yeah, our first 10-to-12 minutes of defense was as good as any 10-to-12 that I can remember in a while. I thought we were locked in. They were fighting, scratching and clawing. Even their first basket was a tough, tough shot that [Noah] Thomasson made. We were really guarding him. That was kind of deflating a little bit, but we were going. Our motors were revved. Guys were flying around, and our huddles were really good.”

“In the second half, obviously, they scored a little bit more, but I still felt like we were guarding. Certainly, a team comes in to play at times, but we did a good job of getting the scout into the game. We did some different things in some of their actions. I was nervous about it because we had blown a couple of those coverages leading up to the game. But we stuck with it, and they did fine. They were assignment-correct.”

“That style of play has kind of been the blueprint for a lot of our wins. We talked a lot at the ending of the game of how we need to play. We need to stay in our character, and I thought for the most part we did tonight.”

Q: Georgia led just once, and it was in the first two minutes of the game. Despite their runs, how were you guys able to keep them at arms’ length distance away?

CJ: “Yeah, we kept relying on our defense. We talked about getting multiple stops. Our leaders like Tolu Smith [III] were very verbal in the huddles. He was very encouraging. In every huddle, he was talking to the guys and saying the right stuff. Cameron Matthews was doing it as well. Our huddles were lively. They were energized, and they were competitive. They felt good. Obviously, we got up 13. Then, bang, it was back to like five. When they got added the point with the video of the review with the three, it felt funny right there because I thought we’d been playing pretty well, and we were only up five.”

"I was really happy to see the response. Let's just be honest, we didn't have a good taste in our mouth. We were very disappointed about our effort and the final score in our last outing. I felt like Monday and Tuesday were huge days for us and how we were going to respond. I just told them when I drove home Monday, because I didn't know after the talks and the practice, that they responded about as well as I could have asked them to respond. Then, to be able to win a game at home and play the way we did, that's got to get them more confident going forward on what we need to do."

Q: With KeShawn tonight and the depth, how important was it for him to get going and for the team to get him the looks they want him to have?

CJ: "He's just so versatile, right? He can score it anywhere on the court with the three, backing down and driving it. The passing is overshadowed. He's an excellent passer. He makes passes like, 'Who's he throwing it to?' and he's just got a feel. But because he can stretch it."

"Like you said, he's an option at small ball five. We've definitely had that in our minds before he got injured, etcetera, even last year just because of the skillset. It's just nice to have more live bodies. You've got another live body. I know D.J. [Jeffries] and Trey [Fort] are working diligently behind the scenes to get back, and we need them both back."

Q: We were talking after the Alabama game and earlier this week about this needing to be the start of that late season turnaround. Are you pleased so far through one game of this critical stretch?

CJ: "I am. Not just the game, but like I said that was a tough night [at Alabama]. That was a tough Sunday. It was a tough meeting. It wasn't a raise the decibel meeting. It was a matter of fact, to the point of this is why it happened. Film, talk. For the first time in a long time, we had players talking. Some things that were said were serious, and I loved how they did it. I loved how they talked about issues that maybe are below the surface."

"Everyone handled it really well. Then, our practice, was one of the better practices we've had in a long time on Monday. That's why I felt good when I went home. Then, on Tuesday, it was a very similar mindset. You could feel that they were ready to play. We're just starting the second half of this deal. There's a lot of games to be played, but certainly considering the circumstances, I loved how we responded."

Q: Cameron Matthews sticks out in the plus-minus column at +23. Talk about the impact he made that makes you so effective when he's on the floor.

CJ: "He's our leader, he's our heartbeat and he's our personality. If I had my druthers, that's how we would play, how he plays. He's got to be a nightmare to talk about because he's got a unique game with not shooting the three much and just his bully drive in and the way he slices the court and his vision to be able to pass to people."

"Him and Tolu [Smith III] have great chemistry that they've developed over time. He's really good on the interior. But now, he's getting better at hitting the guys at the three. He's a major piece of what we're trying to do, and he just needs to continue to be that leader that we need him to be."

Q: What do you think of the way Shawn Jones Jr. has embraced his role over the past two years?

CJ: "We had a tough film session the other day, it was post Ole Miss. I called him out on some things. I didn't know how he'd react, and it's been awesome. He took it, and he's elevated his game. He's elevated his compete level. I thought he made a huge step in his growth as a person and as a player. He's valuable for us, he's got that length. He flies around, he can run and finish."

“Certainly, he can make a three once in a while, enough to keep people honest. Now, he’s shot faking and driving a little bit more. It was invaluable tonight because of the obvious with D.J. [Jeffries], and he stepped right in there. Like I said earlier, I thought he had a really good game despite maybe the numbers not being eye popping.”

Q: There aren’t a lot teams that can have those meetings and come out of it right on the other end. Why do you think this group was able to do that?

CJ: “Like I said earlier, we’re just starting this second half of the SEC, but I didn’t know. I didn’t know. I knew what I wanted. I talked before just because last year we had a similar record. We flipped it and played our way into the NCAA Tournament. Just because we did that, and I’ve told them that, doesn’t mean it’s going to happen again. That particular team stayed together and stayed the course and continued to work. We figured out a way to put ourselves in position to win enough games in order to do that. With this team, I don’t know. But you’ve got to start somewhere, and we’re on the right track.”

Mississippi State Guard Dashawn Davis and Forward Cameron Matthews

Q: With you guys not having D.J. [Jeffries] for tonight and probably a few games moving forward, how big was that? How much of a mental focus was it to step up defensively and fill that role that he had?

CM: “Our focus all week was just getting back right defensively and getting back to our identity. So, with or without D.J. playing this week, we were going to try to get back to that. But we’ve got guys like Shawn Jones [Jr.] and Murph [KeShawn Murphy] to step up. It’s never that we worry about the guy that’s down, it’s always the next guy back up.”

Q: Rams, coming into this one, you knew the guard rotation was a big part of their offense. Was that something y’all talked about this week?

DD: “Yeah, we were kind of focusing in on number 4 [Silas Demary Jr.] and number 11 [Justin Hill]. They’re good players, and we knew we had to lock in on them for sure.”

Q: Cam, how big was the rebounding advantage tonight for you guys?

CM: “It’s really, really big. That what we try to make our identity about. Just rebounding, playing harder on the other team and really good defense. So, it’s just really exiting to get back on that side of things.”

Q: How big was it to get this win tonight and hopefully have some momentum this weekend heading into Missouri?

DD: “It was big. We needed this win for sure, just to let us know and give us confidence again that we can beat anybody.”

Q: You mentioned KeShawn, how nice was it to get him back, and how important is it for you guys to have him be productive going forward?

CM: “It’s really exciting to have Murph back. He’s a really good player. We’re just going to work on getting him back into the flow of things, locking in on scout and different things like that. I have confidence in Murph that he’s going to get back right, as you all can see. So, shoutout to Murph. Good game little bro.”

Q: It was a tough stretch starting for you in SEC play, you had that strong second half against Ole Miss. Do you feel like you're starting to get that momentum and confidence back in yourself?

DD: "Yeah, shoutout to my teammates and my coaches. They're pushing me and helping me get through the tough times."

Q: You mentioned Shawn Jones [Jr.] too at the start, what did you think of the way he stepped up into a starting role, a bigger role for him? How much confidence do you have in him?

DD: "Shawn Jones, we've got a lot of confidence in him. He's a Dawg and a really good player. Really high effort and really high compete level. So, we already knew what we were going to get from Shawn. It's just that we've got to get him to get out there and do it every night at a high level."

Q: You had eight assists tonight and you fed Tolu [Smith III] a lot. It seemed like he had more explosion tonight to the rim than we've seen this season. Do you feel like he's getting closer to back to being the old Tolu?

CM: "In his career [laughter]."

DD: "Yes, with that injury, it just takes time. So, he's coming back for sure."

Q: Can you talk about the scoring balanced tonight with four guys with double digits points?

CM: "Yeah, just having even and balanced scoring makes it easier for everybody else to get involved. There's no one option you can really key in on. Everybody is just clicking on all cylinders."

Georgia Head Coach Mike White

Q: What were your thoughts on how Mississippi State played?

MW: "They shot it from three well. They hit nine of them. That's not necessarily their strength. They were terrific on the interior and terrific on the offensive glass. They have struggled from the foul line as well [in past games]. They cashed in from there [the foul line] as well as from the three."

"So, credit to them, for stepping up making shots. Their turnover ratio was really good. I thought they handled our changing defenses. We threw the kitchen sink at them, and they made good decisions, including the dunk at the end of the game, all the way down the stretch."

"Tolu [Smith III] was fantastic. They outrebounded us on the glass by 10. They get 11 offensive rebounds which is about as good as we can do. We missed a couple block outs, but I thought our attention to detail was fantastic. I thought our team played hard."

Q: What were your thoughts on holding Mississippi State without an offensive rebound for 12 minutes?

MW: "We had good attention to detail on the defensive glass. It was as good as it's been all year. I liked the way we shared it [the ball]. I liked our looks in the first half and even better in the second half. Noah [Thomasson] made a couple hard looks in the second half."

"In this building, against this defense, I will take those looks. Tolu [Smith III] was too much. He had second-chance points and a couple live ball turnovers ... We were sending a second guy at him the whole game. We had a miscue there with four minutes to go, and we got dunked on. That attention to detail. With the firing of the post, the 'B' needed to be an 'A'. We did some good things."

Q: What did you think of your team's shot selection?

MW: "We just saw a top 15 to top 20 defense in the country. At home, they're probably in the top 10 or top 5. They're good, credit to those guys. They fly around, and they rotate. [Coach] Jans has these guys guarding at a high level of speed with their quickness that's off the charts. They have connectivity and physicality defensively. It was a high-level SEC game. The game was a little closer than the final score indicated. We were down three with just a few minutes left, but we just could not hold on."

Q: Do you feel the team looked better than it did last week?

MW: "Without question. We played as hard as we played. We were very connected and defended at a very high level. I know [allowing] those 75 points doesn't indicate that from a team that's not the best offensively in our league. Neither are we. Mississippi State was very good. I thought that we were better defensively than we had been in our last couple [games]. We fought hard on the glass. They're a tournament team. Currently, we're not. That said, we've got more opportunities ahead."

Q: What were your overall thoughts on the game?

MW: "I like the way we played in the first half. I liked our looks against as stingy a defense as there is in the country, especially at home. Their numbers indicate that. We have seen it live. They're [Mississippi State] a team that is going to go to the NCAA Tournament. We scored 62. That said, I will take those looks against this defense. I thought we did a lot of good things. We missed some shots that we had to make. We didn't get to the foul line enough. We had some live ball turnovers that haunted us. They converted, and they made nine three's. They converted at a high level. I know they have struggled at times from the foul line. So, I give credit to Mississippi State and the way they defend consistently."

"I thought we defended better tonight than we have as of late. That's nice to see. There was some growth there. We were down three on the road in the SEC with a few minutes [to play]. We gave ourselves a chance. The final score does not indicate how competitive the game was down the stretch. They had back-to-back three's to break it open. The effort was there. The physicality was there, and I thought our guys played really hard."

Q: What did you think was working in the game?

MW: "We were getting some stops, and we were getting out in transition. [Noah] Thomasson was really good offensively off ball screens. We had good production off the bench. We're a little bit unique in that we throw a bunch of guys out there. Certain guys have stepped up on different nights. Blue Cain did some good things. On the offensive glass, we mostly did a good job. Down the stretch late, I thought we had two or three offensive rebounds that were 50/50 balls. That was as big of a difference as anything in the game that they came up with."